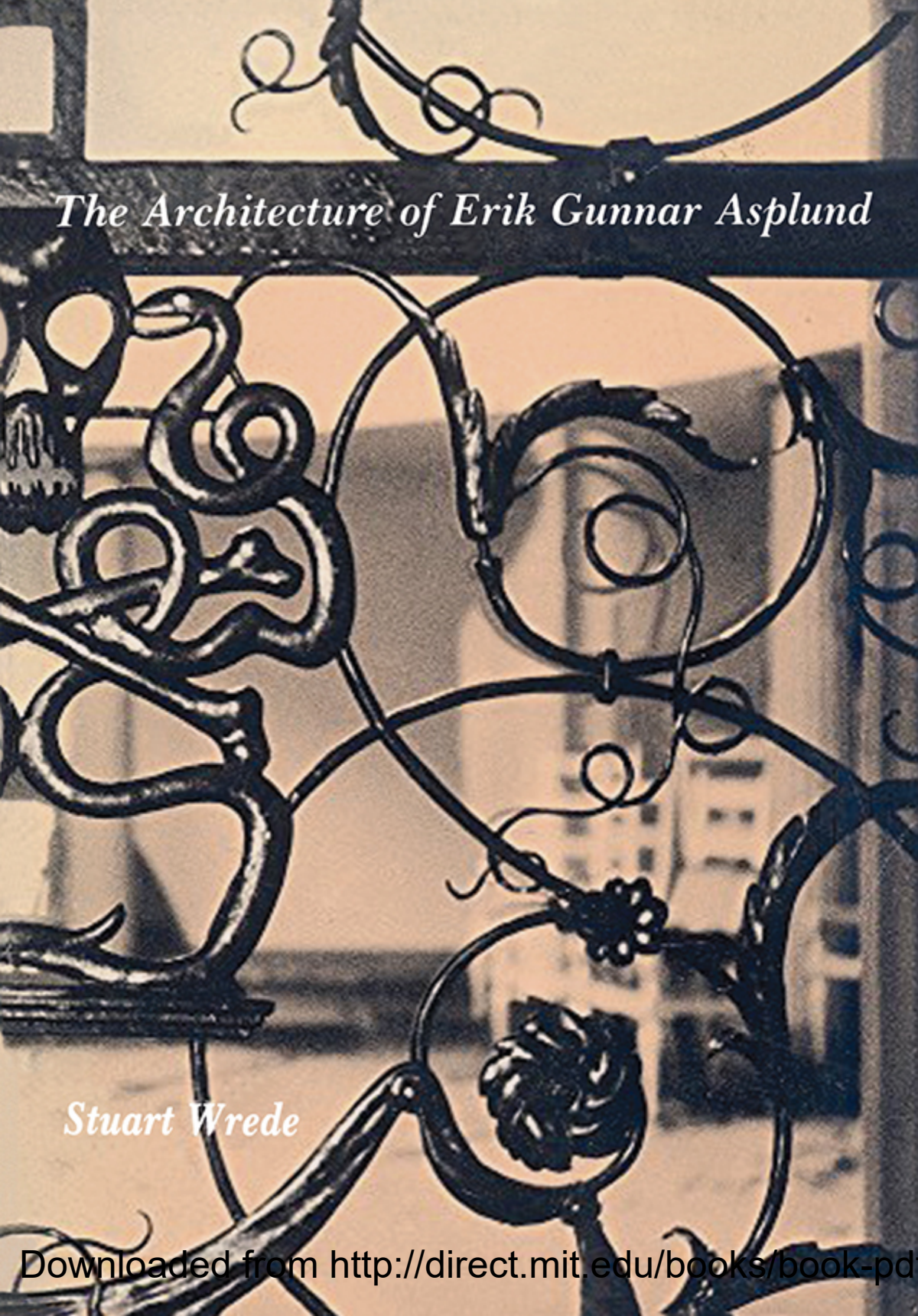

The Architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund

Stuart Wrede

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The Architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund

Stuart Wrede

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts,
and London, England

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Foreword

It would be difficult to imagine a more timely moment to issue a study of the work of Erik Gunnar Asplund. His contribution to twentieth-century architecture has been at once seminal and problematic: seminal because twentieth-century architecture in Scandinavia would have been quite different without his achievement and problematic because the polemicists and historians of the Modern Movement have experienced difficulty in classifying his work. On occasion they have gone so far as to exclude his name from accounts of the period, while in other instances they have been at a loss as to how they should regard him. Should he be seen as a traditionalist for the first half of his career, when he stood somewhat reluctantly on the threshold of modernity until his precipitous entry into the so-called functionalist manner with his famous Stockholm Exhibition of 1930? Or should he be viewed as a modernist in retreat, when, after 1933, his work had the appearance of reverting to the reassuring and acceptable code of tradition?

Most commentators have missed the point that Asplund's whole achievement was set in a particular cultural context of which he was the primary but by no means the sole representative. Only recently have they begun to see that Asplund was part of a general movement in Scandinavia, which at first glance may appear to have been simply traditionalist, but which was, in fact, beginning to come to terms with one of the major problems of architecture in this century. It is possible to formulate this problem as follows: What should be the appropriate architectural code for a newly urbanized society in a constantly changing industrial age? Should it be simply a reinterpretation of the vernacular left behind in the rural past or should it be the necessarily foreign and in most instances imported classicism to

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which an urban populace could hardly be the natural heir? This is the dilemma that Adolf Loos tried to confront in his essay *Architektur* of 1910 and it is surely this which motivated the Soviet Union to institutionalize Social Realism as the party line in architecture after 1932.

Stuart Wrede shows how this dilemma was confronted much earlier in Scandinavia, and with greater subtlety, perhaps, than was the case in most European countries. In Sweden a concern for cultural continuity expressed itself first around 1910 in an impulse to return to a primitive, almost mythical, form of building, to a kind of *Urarchitektur* as Goethe would have understood it; to a proto-Enlightenment mode which would be capable of reinterpreting classicism in vernacular terms and vice versa; an expression capable of circumventing the pathological need to choose simplistically between two equally unacceptable historicist styles, classicism on the one hand and the vernacular on the other. This drive to reinvigorate European architecture by reconstituting classical elements in almost vernacular terms had first come to the fore in the Biedermeier period, and it is hardly an accident that this impulse should have returned with the Scandinavian romantic classical revival, stimulated by the publication of Paul Mebes's book *Um 1800* in 1908. Appearing at an opportune moment, when the Nordic Richardsonian National Romantic manner was virtually exhausted, this *répétition différente* in neoclassical terms was enthusiastically embraced as a means of revitalizing Scandinavian architecture.

This return first manifested itself in terms which were not quite classical, most notably in Ragnar Östberg's domestic work, in his invention of the skewed plan as a device for reconciling the empirical delicacy of the English Arts and Crafts house with the more monu-

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mental forms of the Swedish manor house tradition. Wrede shows how Asplund derived his own topographic approach from the catalytic lead of Östberg's domestic planning and how this unique development was to have wide repercussions for the evolution of Scandinavian architecture from the earliest essays of Östberg to the last works of Alvar Aalto. He writes: "At its best this approach took into consideration the regulating lines of the site, the dynamics of circulation, and function, and thus came to symbolize a user-oriented accommodation and informality which eventually, via Asplund, was also to become a hallmark of the work of Alvar Aalto."

Apart from the issue of stylistic acceptability and the question of architectural precedent, Wrede emphasizes the role played by symbolic and psychologically disjunctive elements in Asplund's work: the theme of constrictive passage or the simultaneous presentation of mutually contradictory signals such as the adjacent location of the main and garden entrances in the Villa Snellman. The author points out Asplund's peculiarly conjunctive use of constricted and inflated forms that seemingly make subtle and complex allusions to the themes of pregnancy and birth. According to Wrede, Asplund resorted to these themes early in his career with his design for the Lister County Courthouse (1917–1924) wherein, as he points out, ". . . the awkward relationship of circle to rectangle reinforced by the side walls of the lobby, which are splayed, suggests the possibility of an internal force pressing the circular courtroom out of the rectangle, or . . . that the rectangle is giving birth to the circle. The idea is further expressed by the cascading front stairs and by the tautness of the building membrane itself, which evokes internal tensions." Similar evocations of barely restrained

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internal forces seem to occur frequently in Asplund's work; unquestionably in his Stockholm Public Library, completed in 1928, where an atectonic prism gives the illusion of insufficient mass to contain the explosive force of the pregnant form within; that is to say, the strong cylindrical volume of the reading room itself. This theme crops up again in the loosely organized State Bacteriological Laboratories (1933–1937) wherein, as Wrede suggests, the central refrigerator seems to have been rendered as "a monument of our modern power over life and death. . . . the embryo within the womb."

While Wrede explains how this motif was appropriate to the tomb and to the symbolism of the Scandinavian cremation movement—the ancient mound and cavelike forms associated with the archaic, earth mother image of the eternal return—he is at a loss to account for its particular presence in the Lister County Courthouse except in personal terms or as a reflection of a Strindbergian, not to say generally Nordic, preoccupation with procreation and death. In his conclusion, Wrede writes: "Asplund appears to have followed a course which closely parallels developments in modern literature and psychology, with their interest in archetypes, dreams, and the unconscious." While the author does not attempt a psychoanalytic critique of Asplund's work, this suggestive sentence nonetheless reminds us of the critical work of Adrian Stokes, for Stokes might well have been characterizing Asplund when he wrote in his essay *Smooth and Rough* that "a roof overhead is almost as necessary as was the mother herself. Ubiquitous for town and village, buildings seem vast in relation to ourselves: their lower forms are actual to the touch as well as to the eye. A house is a womb substitute in whose

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passages we move with freedom. Hardly less obviously the exterior comes to symbolize the postnatal world, the mother's divorced original aspects or parts smoothed into the momentous whole. . . . Art wins for connective activity a grain of the finality of death. The urgent outwardness, straining to substantiate an image of an independent whole, bears witness to the infantile, newly won, single object whose loss was so feared, whose being, however, imbues the forms of classical architecture."

Beyond its symbolic content the current significance of Asplund's work surely lies in its ability to reflect directly the context in which it is situated, that is to say, in its capacity for creating a sense of place out of the immediate conditions of the environment, be it a particular landscape as in the case of the Woodland Cemetery Crematorium (completed in 1940, the year of Asplund's death) or be it the institutional fabric of the city responded to so sensitively in Asplund's unbuilt proposal for the Royal Chancellery in Stockholm of 1922.

Up to now there have been relatively few accounts of Asplund's career save for the laudatory but long since unavailable memorial volume written by Asplund's friend and colleague Hakon Ahlberg and published in 1943 by the *Svenska arkitekters riksförbund* and two other short monographs: Bruno Zevi's study in Italian of 1948 and Eric de Maré's charming appraisal of 1955, both of which have long been out of print. This work then is doubly welcome, not only for the way in which it fills a longstanding gap in the literature on twentieth-century architecture but also as the first critical appraisal of Asplund's work in any language. While its appearance at a time when the Modern Movement is being reassessed could hardly be more opportune, it

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will no doubt have the more direct and fertile effect of compelling us to reappraise the much neglected contribution made by Scandinavian architecture as a whole.

Kenneth Frampton

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Preface

Erik Gunnar Asplund, who died in 1940 of a heart attack at the height of his architectural career, is today a relatively obscure figure. During the two preceding decades, however, he was Scandinavia's most influential architect, having left his mark on, among others, Alvar Aalto.

A number of books on Asplund's work appeared in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, including a short and sympathetic monograph in Italian by Bruno Zevi.[1] But by far the most comprehensive account was published by the Svenska Arkitekters Riksförbund, well illustrated and with an excellent essay on Asplund's career by Hakon Ahlberg, a friend and colleague.[2] In terms of illustrative material this book, unfortunately out of print, remains the authoritative text. Ahlberg's comments on the projects are perceptive and display a much broader perspective than the typical architectural writings of the period. But his essay does not attempt any analysis or interpretation of the buildings. More recently books have appeared on Asplund in Hungarian and Japanese, indicating a possible international revival of interest in his work.[3] My own text was written in conjunction with a 1978 exhibition on Asplund at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, of which I was guest director.

This book has a twofold purpose: first, to reintroduce Asplund to a generation of architects who have hardly heard of him[4] and for whom there is no readily available account of his work, and second, to make a new attempt at interpreting the significance of his achievement. In these aims I am motivated by the belief that Asplund's work is highly relevant to the architectural concerns of today. It can serve as a guide as we once again discover the relevance of the past to the present

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and as we begin seriously to address the question of meaning in architecture.

A study of Asplund's work also sheds new light on the conflicting cultural forces of the period preceding the Modern Movement. As Uno Ahren, the Swedish architect and polemicist for functionalism, was to observe in speaking of the Stockholm Public Library in 1928,[5] "The inner conflict of the whole era is apparent in Asplund more clearly than in anyone else because he is so intense," a characterization that from today's perspective we would see him as sharing with Adolf Loos, another architect whose work is receiving increasing attention.[6]

In respect to my second aim I have attempted to analyze most of Asplund's more important projects. My analyses are by no means comprehensive. They concentrate on certain motifs which I have found to be central in Asplund's work and which thread through it from the beginning of his career to its end.[7] Others might have chosen different perspectives from which to start, and some no doubt will take exception to my conclusions.

Much has not been dealt with, including Asplund's furniture designs, which are a subject in themselves. I would like to emphasize that this brief study by no means does Asplund justice.[8] His total production is so varied and so complex, both formally and symbolically, that it will warrant, and will no doubt receive, a much more comprehensive study in the future. I would thus like this book to be read as an intermediate report, as an essay whose interpretations and conclusions will need further elaboration in the light of future research and analysis.

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Background

1

The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization in Sweden. Since its days as a great power in Northern Europe in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Sweden had gradually become a country on the periphery of European events, a state from which it was now emerging to play an important social and cultural role. From the 1860s onward, industrialization created a large urban working and middle class and a new, wealthy haute bourgeoisie with cultural aspirations.

Erik Gunnar Asplund, the third of four children, was born in September 1885 in Stockholm and came from an urban, middle-class background. His father, a civil servant, was an official in the Internal Revenue Service. The boy showed an early interest in drawing and art. When both his father and his drawing teacher discouraged him, emphasizing the precarious nature of an artistic career, he decided to become an architect instead.[9]

Asplund began architectural training in 1905, at a very crucial period in the development of Swedish architecture. Although the great renewal in literature and art had begun in the 1880s, architecture continued essentially on its academic and stylistically eclectic path until the early years of the twentieth century.

It is generally agreed that the teachings of I. G. Clason, professor of architecture at the Technical High School from 1890 to 1904, led to the National Romantic revival in Swedish architecture. Clason advocated the use of "natural" materials, sound construction, and a return to the handicrafts.[10] Yet Clason remained essentially an eclectic architect. In the years following 1905, Ragnar Östberg, who had worked for Clason and his classmate Carl Westman, developed what came to be defined as the National Romantic style: a manner

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which, paralleling similar trends abroad, drew heavily on Swedish medieval and vernacular sources. Like them it also found inspiration in the English Arts and Crafts Movement and in the writings of Camillo Sitte. It culminated in Östberg's Stockholm City Hall and Westman's Stockholm Law Courts.[11]

Both Östberg and Westman had an important influence on Asplund while he was studying, first in the years 1905–1909 at the Technical High School in Stockholm, where Eric Lallerstedt, another prominent National Romantic architect, had just been named professor, and subsequently at the short-lived, independent Klara School. Architectural education in Sweden was divided between two schools, optional advanced training being provided for those graduating from the Technical High School at the Academy for the Liberal Arts. However, the professor who had been head of the Academy since Ragnar Östberg's student days almost twenty years earlier had lost touch with architectural developments, and in Asplund's student years his teachings were regarded as increasingly reactionary and irrelevant. In 1909, upon graduating from the Technical High School, Asplund and a number of his fellow students revolted, refusing to study at the Academy and setting up their own free academy, the Klara School, to which they invited Ragnar Östberg, Carl Westman, Ivar Tengbom, and Carl Bergsten as instructors.[12] Yet while Asplund's early work shows the influence of both Westman and Östberg, it was Östberg's plan compositions which were to have a permanent and important influence on Asplund, and, through him, on Scandinavian architecture in general.

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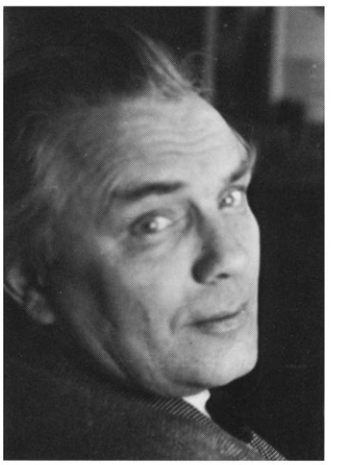
1. Erik Gunnar Asplund,
1910.



2. Erik Gunnar Asplund,
late 1930s.

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Östberg's Development of the Plan

Östberg's early houses display a clear English ancestry in their informal plan and facade compositions. This influence was gradually superseded by an effort to combine the traditional Swedish house, which was essentially an enclosed cubic volume displaying a symmetrical facade, with the English informality of plan.[13] If climate and tradition in Sweden tended to favor the compact, cubic house with a symmetrical exterior, the demands of the modern domestic program (based on English precedents) favored a flexible, asymmetrical, and accommodating plan. The resulting conflict gradually found its resolution through the employment of what might be termed a medieval disarray for the interior, within a rectangular and essentially symmetrical container. Östberg's villa for K. O. Bonnier of 1909 is perhaps the best example, but the motif first appears tentatively with an interior splayed wall in the Villa Pauli of 1904–1905 in Djursholm (fig. 3), a house otherwise showing an English influence. It is an element not typical of either the classical Swedish manor house or of the English country house. It was introduced to give the main hall downstairs a view to the south toward the water. Its source is probably the deep revealed windows of the essentially medieval castles of the Swedish Vasa era. In the men's sitting room at the northeast corner of the building a similarly revealed window, thrusting diagonally toward the south, has been introduced, this time projecting beyond the building mass.[14]

Similar motifs, but now more developed and extensively used, are again found in the villa known as Nedre Manilla, which Östberg designed for K. O. Bonnier in 1909 as an addition to an existing smaller classical building (fig. 4). Here the skewed walls helped resolve the conflict between the demands of the interior

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layout and the requirements of exterior symmetry. But equally important is the feeling of relaxed informality created in the interior spaces, in the lower hall in particular.[15] The deep windows and skewed interior walls create an overall medieval effect, but the exterior of the villa is in the baroque vocabulary of the building to which it is attached and typical of the symmetrical Swedish manor houses of the eighteenth century.

It is interesting to note that this innovation in plan developed independently of exterior stylistic variations. In the Villa Lagercrantz of 1911–1912, by Elis Benckert, a talented young architect who had worked for Östberg, the interior skewed wall also appears, although in a more modest fashion (fig. 5). While retaining the simple cubic massing and even the exterior symmetry, except for the entrance, Benckert gave the whole building, both interior and exterior, a simple vernacular vocabulary, thus creating the purest example of a house in the National Romantic style in Sweden. It was to exercise perhaps the most direct influence on Asplund's important Villa Snellman of 1917–1918.

Östberg's Stockholm City Hall is the most famous of Sweden's National Romantic buildings. Although many find the articulation of facades and roof overly romantic, the subtle mastery of the plan composition, with its carefully studied distortions, is beyond dispute (fig. 6).

Östberg's first proposals, dating from 1902, were for a law court complex that was originally to be placed on the site. The plan was symmetrical, but the exterior was in the medieval brick style of Martin Nyrop's Copenhagen City Hall.[16] With the first city hall project of 1908, the plan began to show significant asymmetries and gradually evolved into the final plan of 1913 (fig. 7). The massing of the building in plan attempts to

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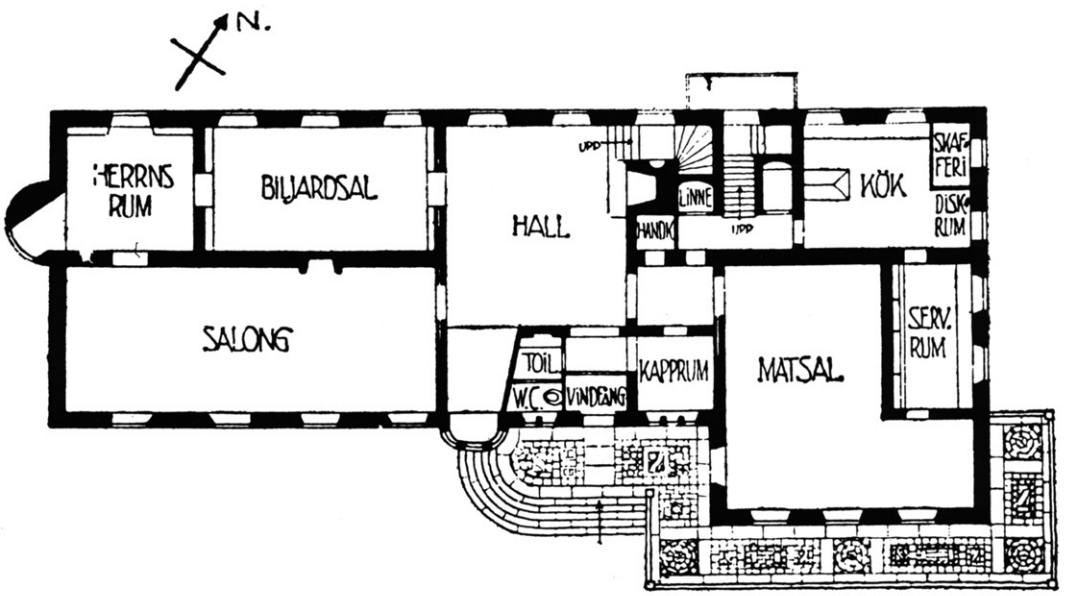

3. Villa Pauli, 1905, Djursholm, plan, by Ragnar Östberg.

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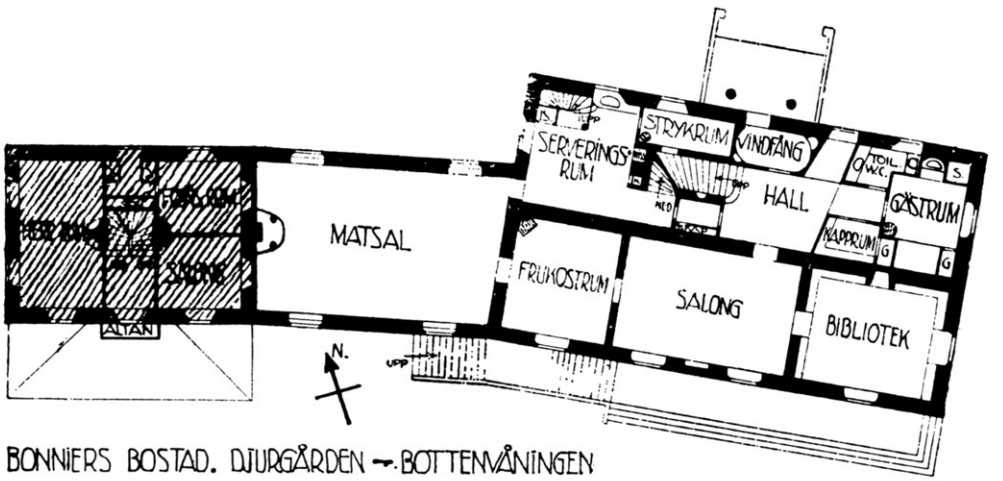

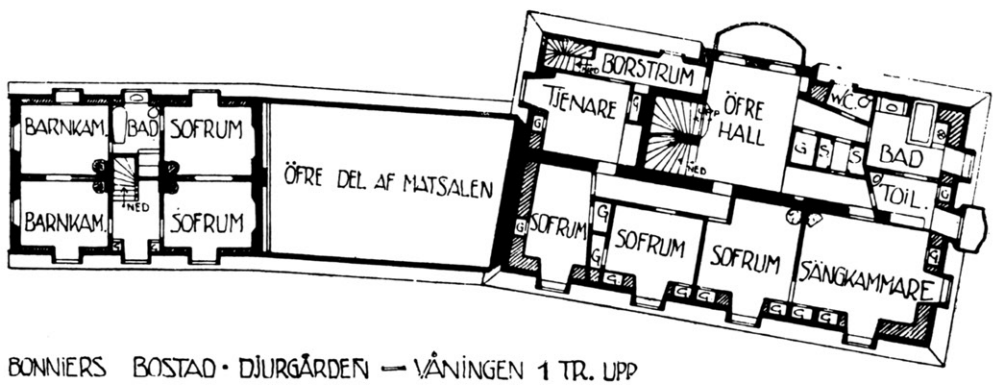

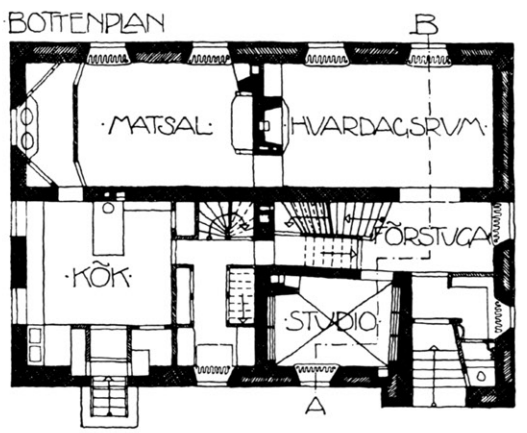

4. Villa for K. O. Bonnier, 1909-1911, Stockholm, plans, by Ragnar Östberg.

5. Villa Lagercrantz, 1910, Djursholm, plan, by Elis Benckert.

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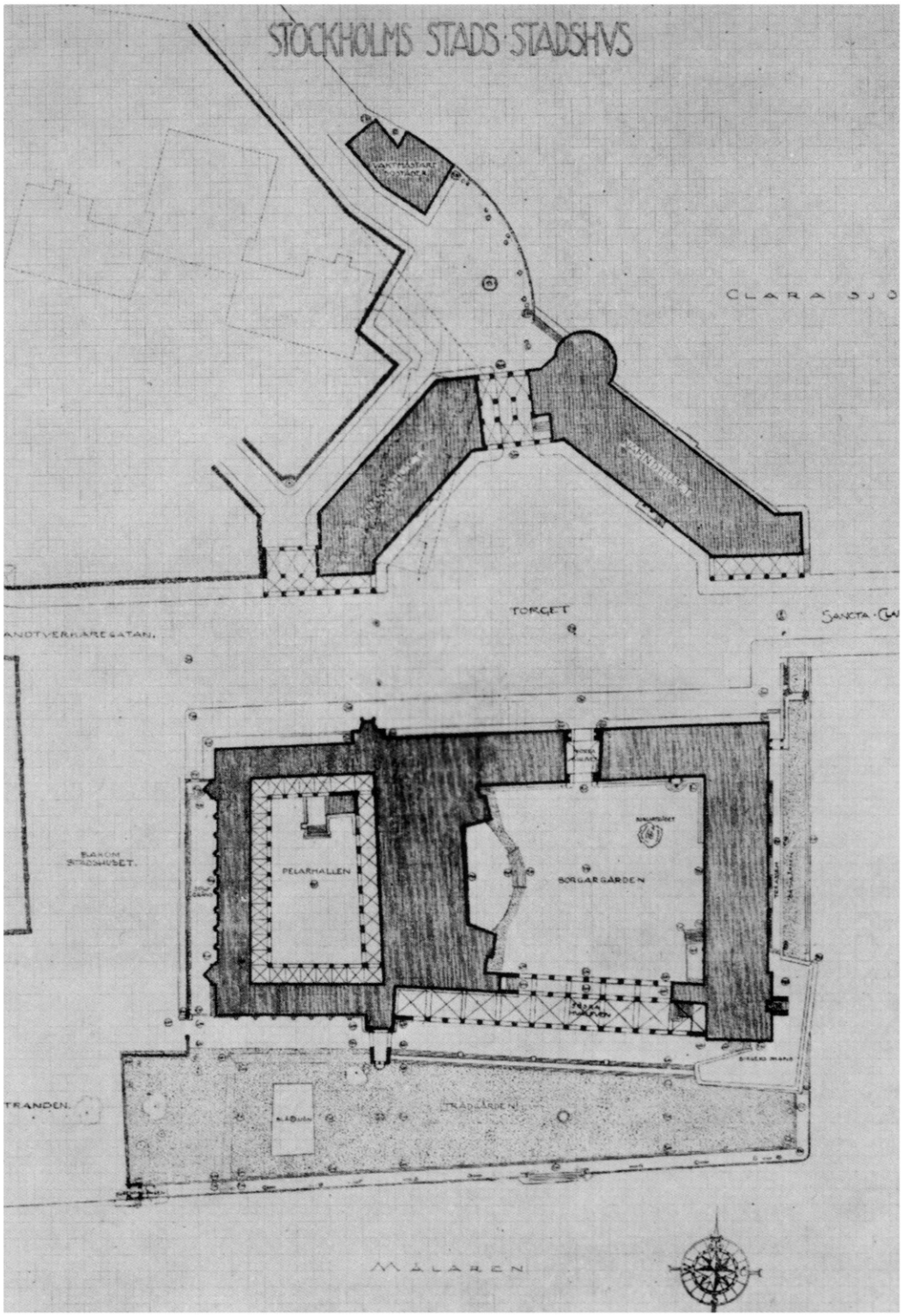

6. Stockholm City Hall, 1913–1923 site plan, by Ragnar Östberg, variation on final plan.

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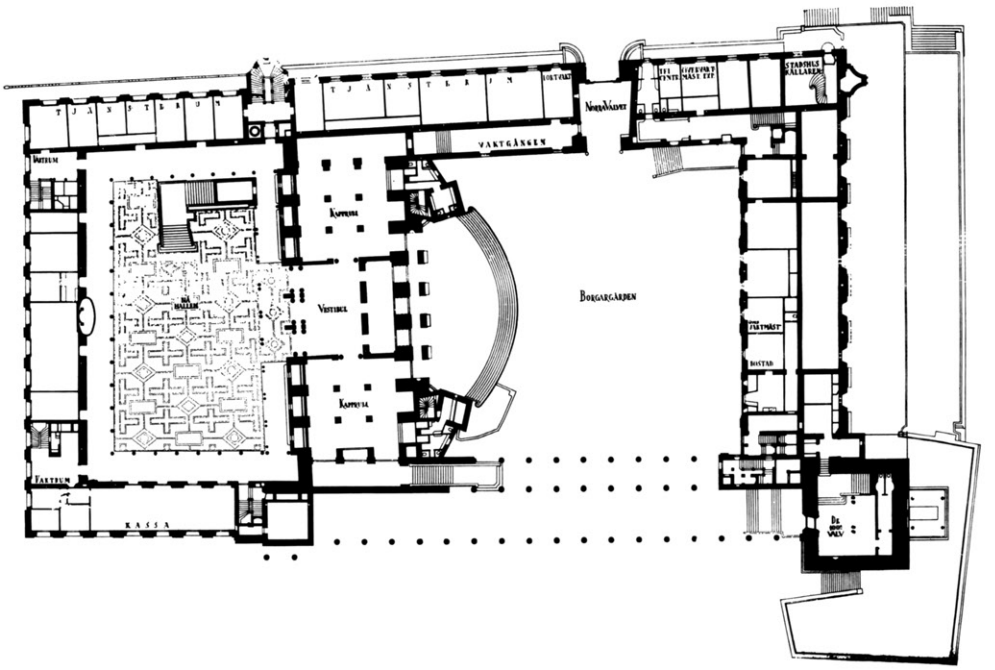
7. Stockholm City Hall, ground floor plan.



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mediate between the two shorelines that come together at an obtuse angle, thus creating a subtly distorted rhomboidal courtyard in the interior while thrusting the main corner tower into a position of greater prominence in relationship to the gardens along the shoreline of Lake Mälaren. The two flanking towers, rhomboidal in plan, which are set in the interior courtyard on either side of the stairs of the ground entrance, are further skewed in relationship to that facade as if they had been pushed into position by the welling out of the stairs.

These effects can of course be ascribed to Östberg's keen observations of architectural and urban forms of the past and of his increasing mastery of picturesque devices in his buildings. In 1909 he had done a series of measured drawings of Leckö, a medieval Swedish castle that displayed, in a much more haphazard way, distortions similar to those he employed (fig. 8).

But, unlike the Bonnier villa, whose interior walls still have a slightly random quality about their formal interrelationships, the city hall displays a much more controlled use of splayed building masses, in relationship both to each other and to the regulating lines of the site. The low-keyed twisting of towers and building wings creates an overall tension in plan, one which is essentially contained by the massive and enclosed quality of the building complex. A more extreme example is provided by the plan for the villa in Stockholm that Östberg designed for the bank director Philip Geber, where a rhomboidal interior courtyard set within a rhomboidal building creates similar tensions (fig. 9).

Östberg's self-conscious and studied use of such devices, which, in their medieval or Mediterranean prece-

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dents, were probably more often (although not always) spontaneous, is significant. While they clearly served picturesque as well as functional ends, in Östberg's hands they became a formal method that made the plan itself an artistic composition. This notion of the plan as an independent design was a significant lesson Asplund was to learn from Östberg. At its best this approach took into consideration the regulating lines of the site, the dynamics of circulation, and function, and thus came to symbolize a user-oriented accommodation and informality which eventually, via Asplund, was also to become a hallmark of the work of Alvar Aalto.[17]

Early Projects

In 1912 Ivar Tengbom and Carl Bersten published a student project from the Klara School for a group of housing blocks around a square in Norrköping to replace a series of low, haphazardly placed existing houses[18] (fig. 10). The blocks dutifully follow the rectilinear street pattern, arranging themselves around the small square. However, an interior wing of accommodations divided the inside of the two main blocks into two separate interior courtyards (fig. 11). There is an impression in plan that the interior wing as well as the exterior indentation of block B have buckled from the implied directional force of the road that enters the small square on a diagonal. While the awkward shape of this interior wing has precedent in medieval urbanism, its insertion in the rectilinear block and the implied force that has been exerted on it are startling. There seems little doubt that Asplund was chiefly responsible for this design, as it not only seems to have had a bearing as a plan on his future development but also includes facade elements that were later to appear in his

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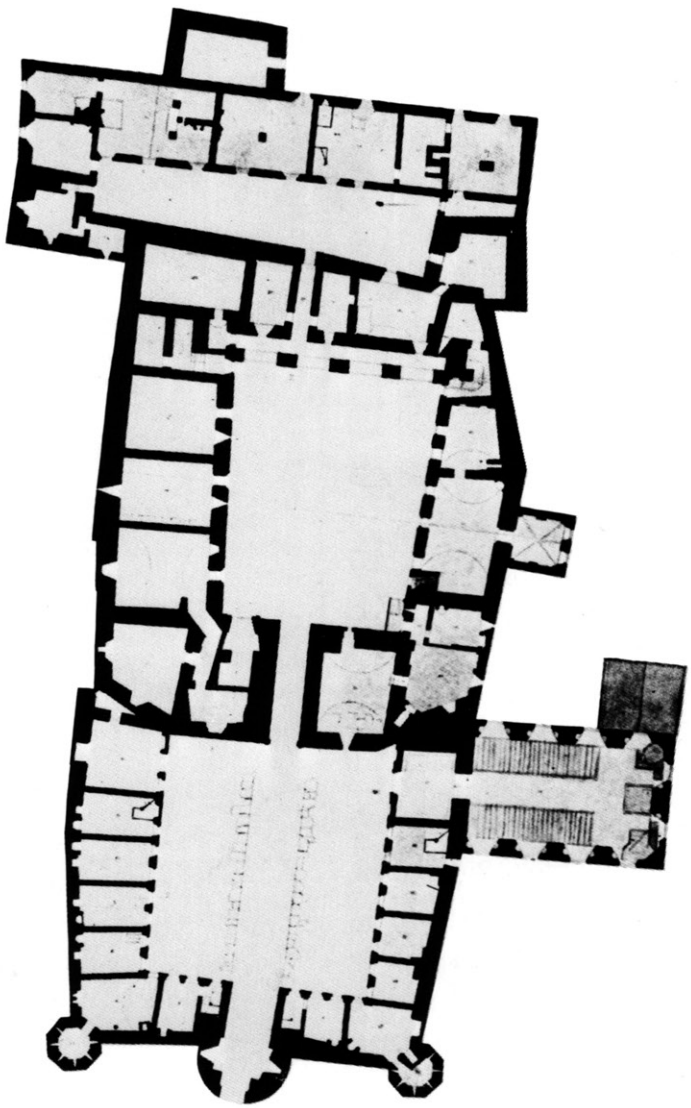
8. Leckö Castle, plan.



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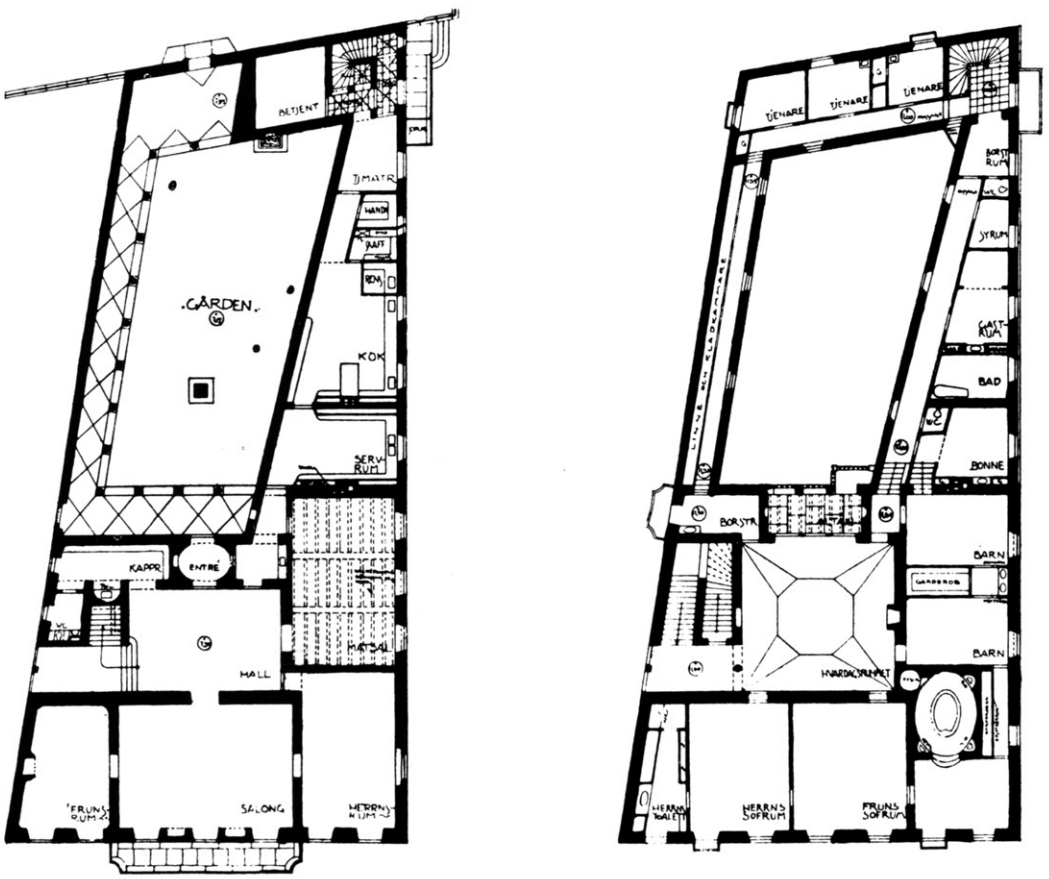

9. Villa Geber, Stockholm, 1911, plans, by Ragnar Östberg.

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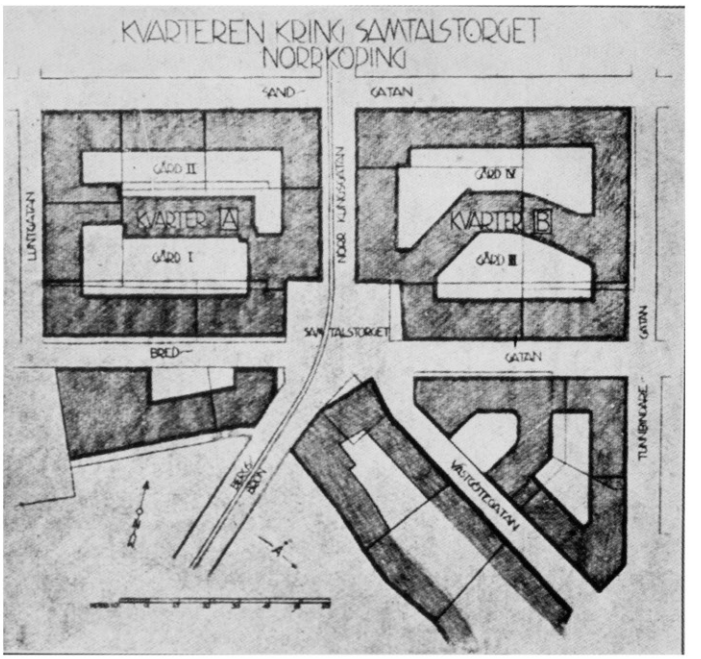
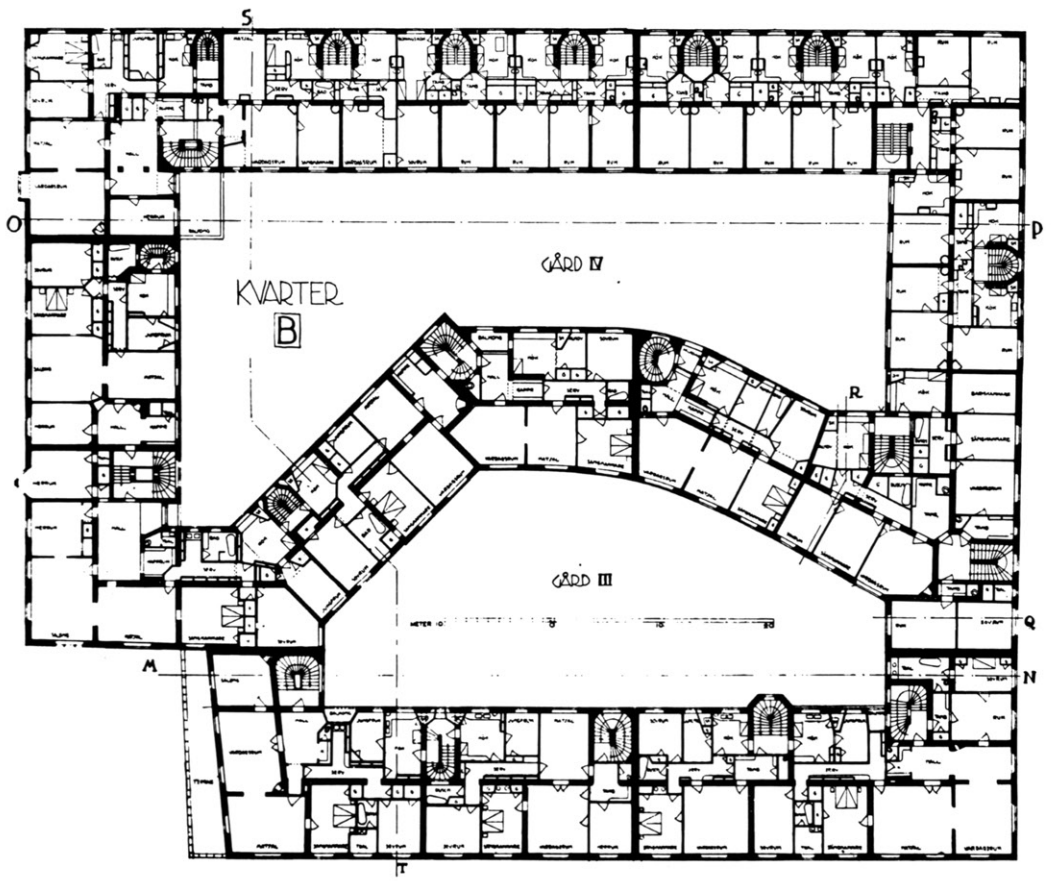


10. Housing project, Norrköping, student team project, 1910–1911, site plan.

11. Housing project, Norrköping, student team project, 1910–1911, plan, block B.



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winning competition entry for the Karlshamn secondary school. In its implied tensions the plan owes a debt to Östberg, but in its use of forms and even in its reference to external forces it is already quite original.

Three villas that Asplund designed in these early years are also of interest. The villa for Ivar Asplund, his brother, at Danderyd, designed in 1911 but never built, is a typical board and batten house with a modified mansard roof, a style popularized at the time by Westman and Östberg (figs. 12, 13). But in its play on the scale of the large second-story windows (in this case the piano nobile) against the tiny windows of the main entry floor (actually a basement) it is a surprising break with convention.

The Rosenberg villa in Karlshamn of 1912, unfortunately never built, owes a debt to both English and Italian country houses (fig. 14). In its use of materials, stucco and tile roof, and in its elegant vernacular it anticipates the Villa Snellman of 1917. But here also a theme, the enigmatic juxtaposition of entries and passages, appears for the first time in Asplund's work. It was to reoccur often.

The large wooden villa for Dr. Ruth in Kuusankoski, Finland (never before published), was designed and built in 1914 (figs. 15 and 16). It displays Asplund's mastery of the Swedish National Romantic villa mode. The curving, asymmetrical roofline of the entry gable shows an English influence as well as further variations on the theme found in the villa for his brother, Ivar Asplund. But the Villa Ruth, unlike the Villa Rosenberg, seems to stand a long way from the Villa Snellman of three years later.

In 1912 Asplund won the competition for a secondary school in Karlshamn. The design, asymmetrically

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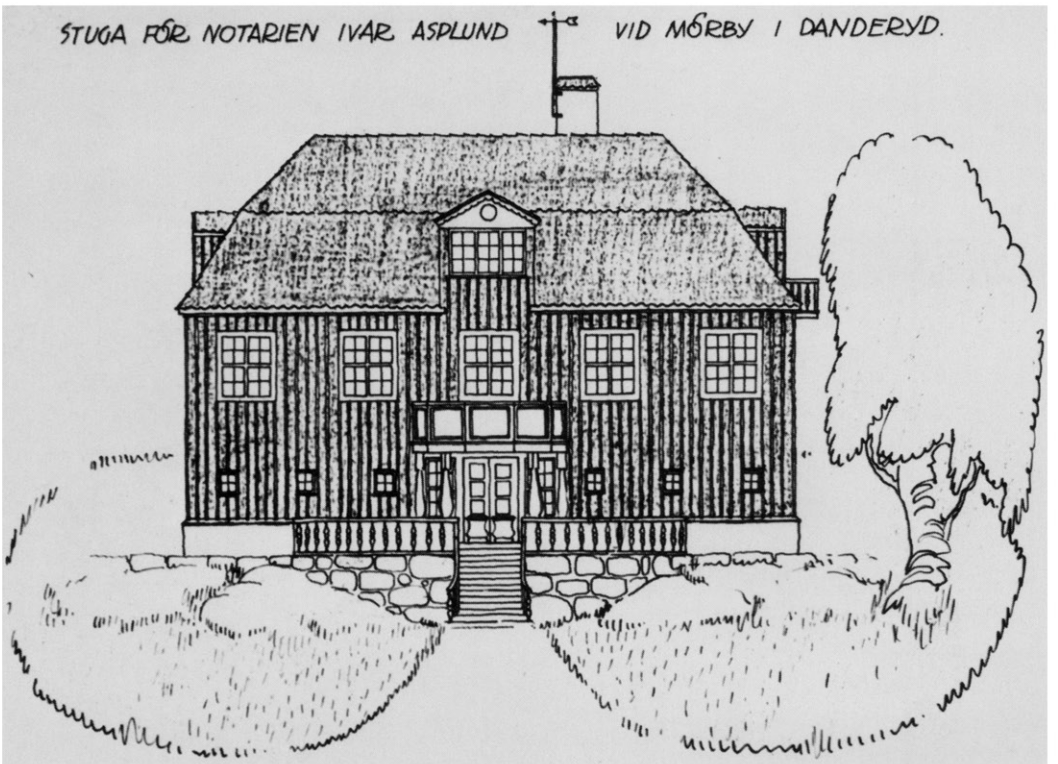
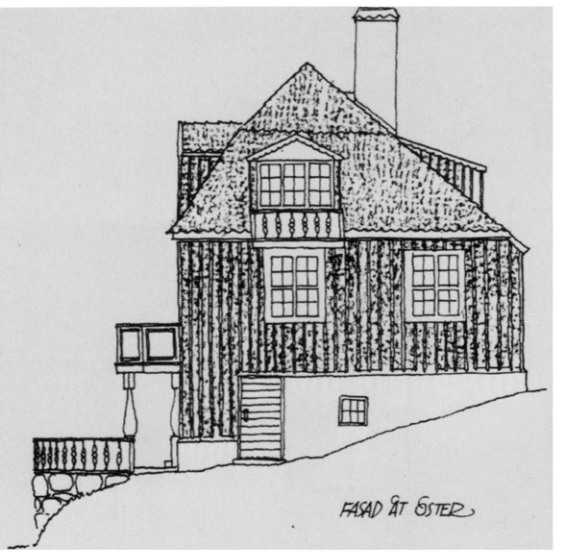
12. Villa for Ivar Asplund, Danderyd, 1911, front facade.





13. Villa for Ivar Asplund, east facade.

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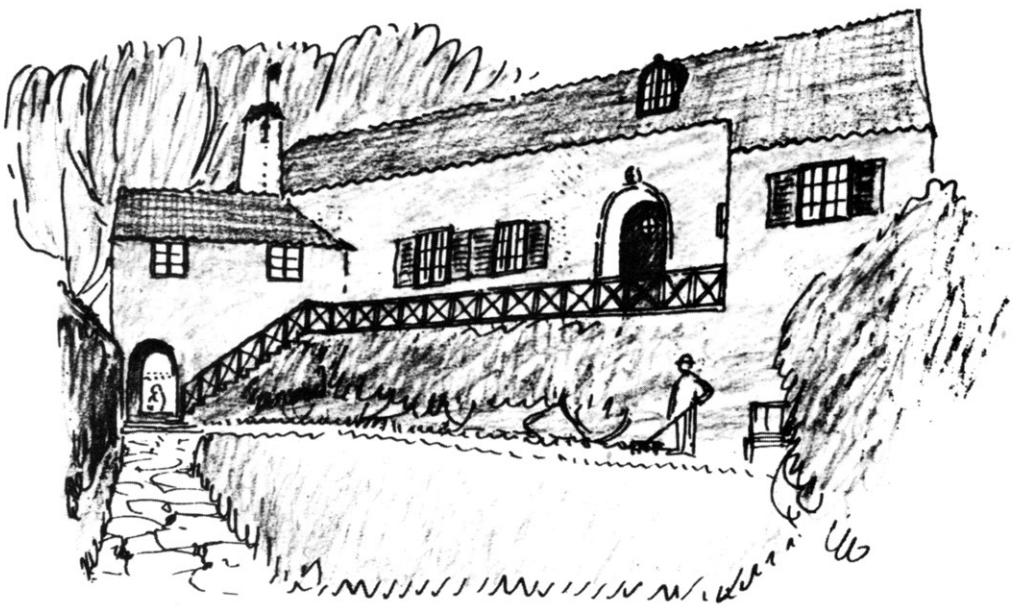

14. Villa Rosenberg, Karlshamn, 1912, perspective sketch.

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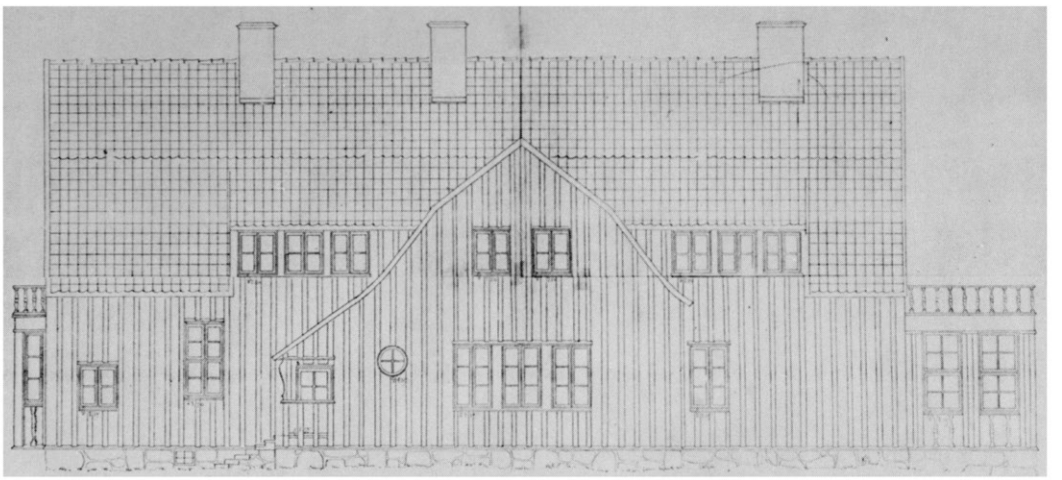

15. Villa Ruth, Kuusankoski, Finland, 1914, drawing, front facade.

16. Villa Ruth, garden facade.

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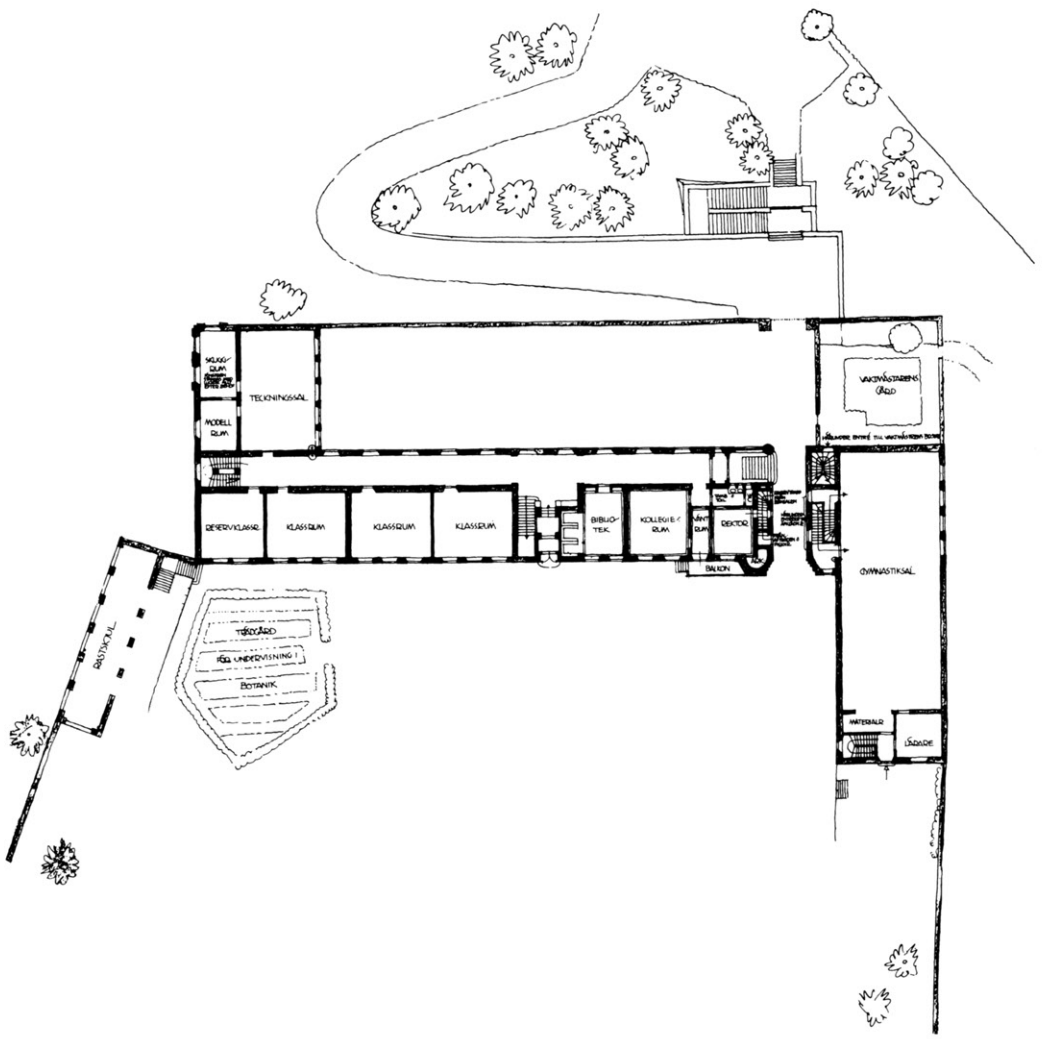
17. Secondary school, Karlshamn, 1912, plan.



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composed and in a National Romantic vocabulary reminiscent of Westman's Stockholm law courts, won the approval of the jury, which comprised, among others, I. G. Clason and Erik Lallerstedt. Functionally it was a major step in improving the flexibility of school design. But what strikes one today as the most interesting element of the plan is the loggia attached at an angle with a short connecting wall to the corner of the main building (fig. 17). It was on a high point and was meant to afford shelter and a point of lookout to the sea. It is the first instance in Asplund's work of the use of minimal angled corner connections between building wings, a motif that was also to reoccur frequently.[19]

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Romantic Naturalism and the Integration of the Classical and the Vernacular

2

The National Romantic movement in architecture, with its interest in Sweden's architectural past, was the most apparent influence on the young Asplund. But to explain the development his work was to take during his first decade out of architecture school one must examine the body of ideas which animated the era and which provided the impetus for its architecture. For Scandinavia's part these ideas tended to have their source, albeit with a time lag and a certain modification, in the German-speaking countries of the continent. Stanford Anderson, in his doctoral dissertation, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany," 1900–1917, succinctly presents the ideas and concerns upon which the serious architecture of this post-Jugend, premodernist era drew.

The fall of Jugendstil was followed by a still more concerted endeavor to begin at the beginning. Everything that was judged to be archetypal, primitive or elemental, and charged with simple but fundamental distinctions came to be of prime interest. These interests do not begin abruptly in 1902, but they do take on new urgency. Historic periods of intensified interest included pre-history, the ancient Near East, Egypt, the Geometric Period of ancient Greece, Early Christianity including early Byzantium, other selected early medieval periods such as the Carolingian, Ottonian, and Tuscan Romanesque. Primitive art was of concern: the Volkerwanderung, art of contemporary primitive peoples, the art of the child and of the naive adult. The architectural parallel was anonymous architecture and everything that was *sachlich.* There was also the primitivity of new materials and a new technology. Engineering construction of all sorts, machine building, the American skyscraper, and everything that was functional; e.g., the sail boat and the bicycle. Specifically in architecture there was the elemental and prismatic late medieval, north European brickwork. In psychology, Freud lent new significance to primitivity, and in psychophysiology there was the continuing interest in the elemental experience of pure form, pure color, abstract

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space, etc. The studies of Riegl were of special interest because they were simultaneously concerned with establishing a teleological understanding of the artist's volition, interpreting early medieval art as a new beginning, and understanding the origin of such an art in the confluence of the forms of a full-blown ancient culture with the forms of primitive peoples. This constellation of problems seemed indeed to be the model for the modern situation. Consequently, any modern event that seemed to participate in such an attempt at bringing together thought and feeling, developed culture and primitive instincts, was also of interest. The best period to have accomplished this with some degree of success was the Romantic period with Goethe and Schinkel as the heroes. Biedermeier was the heir to this and exemplified the possibility that such a desired union of cultural sophistication and anonymous sensibility could thrive as a bourgeois generalization. . . . The preservation of a noble, but simple domestic life in England and that country's new domestic architecture could be interpreted similarly. Yet another twist of the theme and the new American domestic architecture could be seen as the evolution of a healthy domestic culture in a new and primitive land. Finally, it was as easy to read such writers as Nietzsche, Langbehn and Steiner in connection with a still more primitive beginning as it had been earlier in connection with Jugendstil.

In the search for that which is elemental in experience and in art, anything that was overtly geometric was studied. And that which was not overtly geometric, be it organic life, a complex art form, or the abstract conception of space, was studied in order to discover its underlying geometry. The fundamental geometric forms represented the elemental union of primitive instinct and developed reason. Supposedly at the age of eight, Rudolf Steiner "knew happiness for the first time" when he learned through the study of geometry to "lay hold upon something in the spirit alone." At the same time, through analytical discovery and artistic projection, this became the connection between inner and outer experience.[20]

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Common to this wide range of interests appears to be a striving to reach underlying principles, the roots of various architectures, whether medieval, primitive, or classical. Equally, the combining of classical and medieval vernacular motifs was pursued as an important end in itself, a method of renewal—although stylistically oriented historians have suggested that it was a mere transitional phase between National Romanticism and the classicism of the 1920s. Of particular importance to Asplund, one senses, was the strong psychological and spiritual dimension in this body of ideas, the interest in archetypal forms, in the symbolic dimension of geometry, in the primitive and the unconscious.

Certain developments in literature and art in Sweden which were instrumental in spawning that country's version of National Romanticism in building were also to have a marked effect on Asplund's approach to architecture. The new sensibility developed in the 1890s in literature, specifically in the poetry and other writings of Verner von Heidenstam, and in the landscape painting of the period. Heidenstam advocated a new nationalism, one of whose main roots, according to Staffan Bjork, was the "physiological myth of the organic affinity between man and the land he grew up on."[21]

Heidenstam, who had started out studying painting, influenced and was influenced by the artists of the period. They, like him, having spent years abroad, working and studying in Paris, were to rediscover their native land and the Nordic landscape. Richard Bergh, the most articulate of the painters, spoke of a "desire to deepen their art through contact with the land and the people to which they themselves belonged, just as intensely and organically as the branches and leaves of a tree belong to it."[22] The goal of the painters was to capture the lyrical soul of the landscape, to focus on the

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totality and its emotional impact rather than on realistic detail. The movement, which represented a break with the French color-and-light realist tradition in which many of its members had been schooled, may be seen as a new manifestation of the Northern Romantic tradition.[23]

In 1893 Heidenstam threw himself into the architectural debate that had arisen over the restoration of certain old castles in Sweden.[24] He inveighed against the lifeless restoration practices of the period, which attempted to impose a stylistic unity on heterogeneous building complexes that had come into being over centuries and which consisted of fragments of many architectural periods and styles.

The critic Gotthard Johansson, in a short article written at the completion of Östberg's Stockholm City Hall in 1923,[25] was to note the symbolic importance of the fact that Verner von Heidenstam gave the dedicatory address at its opening. He wrote, "Ragnar Östberg's creation is the direct artistic equivalent of his [Heidenstam's] poetry, a creation arising from the same source." One may also detect a clear echo of Heidenstam's sensibility in the work of Asplund, where it was eventually to take on a different form than in the work of Östberg. Both Asplund's feel for the Nordic landscape and a building's relationship to it and his sense of buildings as rich in associations and emotional content can be said to stem from Heidenstam and the landscape painters of the 1890s.

One may speculate that another important and direct influence on Asplund's thinking was the writings of his countryman, August Strindberg, whose work Asplund greatly admired.[26] The richly visual quality and the surreal symbolic angst-laden imagery of such Strindbergian works as the *Dream Play* would seem to be the most

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direct source for similar images that were to make their appearance in Asplund's work before surrealism emerged as a recognized artistic movement.[27]

Asplund would to some extent have come in direct contact with the currents of thought permeating the continent in the summer of 1910 when he traveled to Germany and Belgium on a scholarship from the Royal Institute of Technology to study facing materials. Though his report on the trip in *Byggmästaren*[28] is mostly of a technical nature, the projects he chose to illustrate may cast some light on what particularly impressed him. Included are buildings by Theodor Fischer, whose Romanesque medievalism can be seen as a German equivalent of National Romanticism in Sweden, and work in Darmstadt by Joseph Olbrich, whose unorthodox sensuality may have struck a responsive chord in Asplund.

Asplund's long trip to Italy and France (mostly Italy) on the eve of World War I (1913–1914) was to elicit a much more ebullient response from him in sketches and diary entries than the dry technical article on the German trip. But though one senses from his travel notes that the trip was both a joy and an inspiration,[29] it probably was not critical in the formation of his architectural sensibility, which seems to have been well developed by then; in going through his voluminous travel sketches[30] one perceives a high degree of selectivity and a mature sensibility already at work. Asplund seems to have been particularly drawn to unexpected, humorous, and mannered details rather than to the strictly classical or the purely picturesque. The wonderful, bizarre sculptural details that Italian craftsmen had integrated into their buildings through the centuries seem to have found a particularly appreciative response in Asplund's sketch pad. Another significant impression evident

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from his diary was his feeling for the relationship of building to landscape. For after his return, when, in the Competition for the South Stockholm Cemetery, he and Sigurd Lewerentz designed a large-scale project involving buildings and landscape, it was to Mediterranean precedents as well as Nordic archetypal images they turned.

The Competition for the South Stockholm Cemetery

The rapidly increasing population of Stockholm in the late nineteenth century created the necessity for a major expansion of the city's cemetery space. A seventy-five-hectare area adjacent to the existing South Stockholm Cemetery was set aside, and an international competition was announced. Among the jury were Ragnar Östberg and Lars Israel Wahlman.[31] The recently developed parklike cemeteries of Germany, such as the Münchener Waldfriedhof, where the cemetery was developed in and around an existing pine forest, were considered exemplary, and the program stressed that the beauty of the forested site was to be considered a major asset by the entrants.[32]

Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, who had been classmates at the Klara School, agreed to enter the competition together. Asplund, impressed by a project for a crematorium for Helsingborg by Lewerentz and Torsten Stubelius, which he had seen at the 1914 Baltic Exhibition in Malmö, had suggested the collaboration.[33]

The two young architects emerged as the winners over the fifty-two other entries registered, which included a number of German projects. Though the winners, more than any other competitor, took the landscape as their point of departure, they were, partly as a consequence, to ignore the requirement for a clear and straightforward circulation system. They provided only a system of narrow winding paths throughout the area

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which left the existing forest essentially untouched (fig. 18). They were, however, better than any other competitor, to succeed in capturing a naturalistic romantic mood, a composition drawn partly from Nordic and Mediterranean landscape traditions and partly from burial archetypes. All these elements were freely mixed, for instance, in the promenade (the Way of the Cross) leading up to the main chapel, lined with tombs and sarcophagi, like Pompeii's Via Sepulchra, and set amid a fir forest (fig. 19).

The plan called for the placing of graves in the forest, informally arranged alongside narrow pedestrian walks (fig. 20). The sections showing the molding and terracing of the former gravel pits as well as of the various paths and roads in the forest, some sunken with earth mounds on either side, unequivocally displayed the most refined and subtle landscape sensibility of all the entries (figs. 21, 22, 23).

The Way of the Cross, winding up the hill gently in a double curve to the main chapel at the summit, is perhaps the most remarkable and strongest feature of the scheme, and the great, leaning, wooden cross set amid the trees, marking its beginning, its clearest symbol. Though Arnold Böcklin's 1880 painting, *Island of the Dead,* had become an important source of inspiration to cemetery and crematorium architecture in Germany,[34] it is to the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) and their highly evocative nature symbolism that we must turn to find a parallel in art to Asplund's and Lewerentz's scheme. Unlike Böcklin's work, where man and his creations remain the dominant element, in Friedrich's portrayals nature is the dominant force and man but a small presence. Although Friedrich's work had been rediscovered in Germany in 1906, there is no

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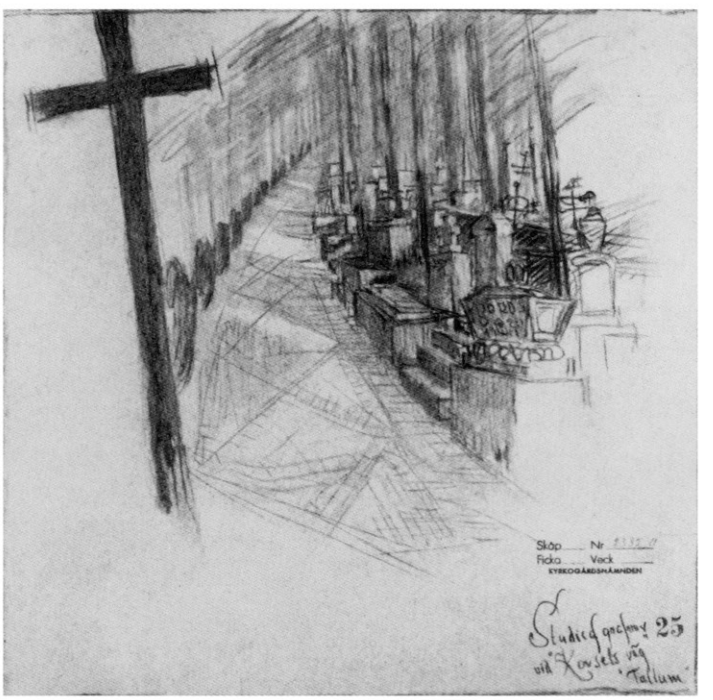
18. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, 1915, perspective of "The Way of the Cross."



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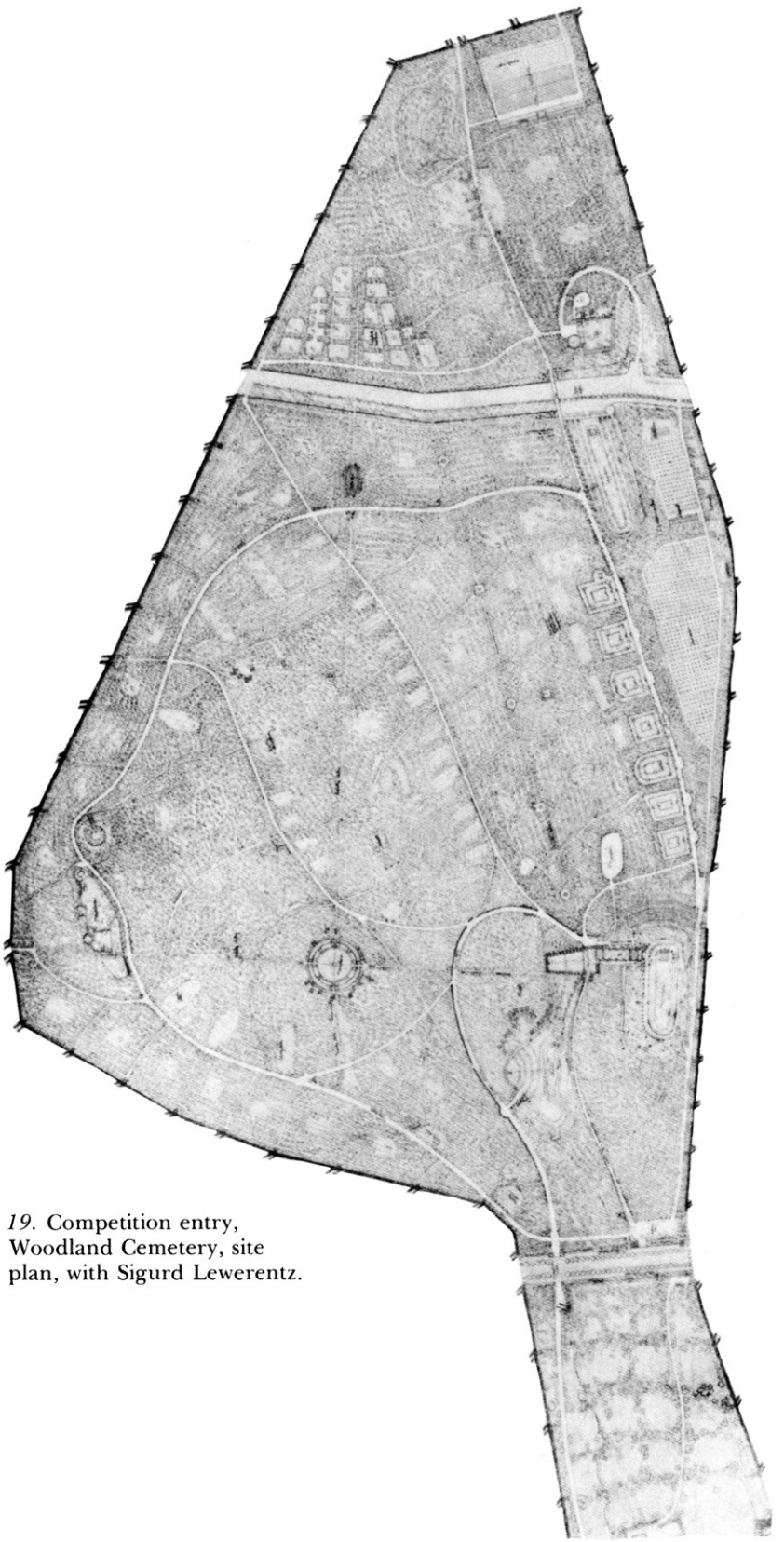

19. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, site plan, with Sigurd Lewerentz.

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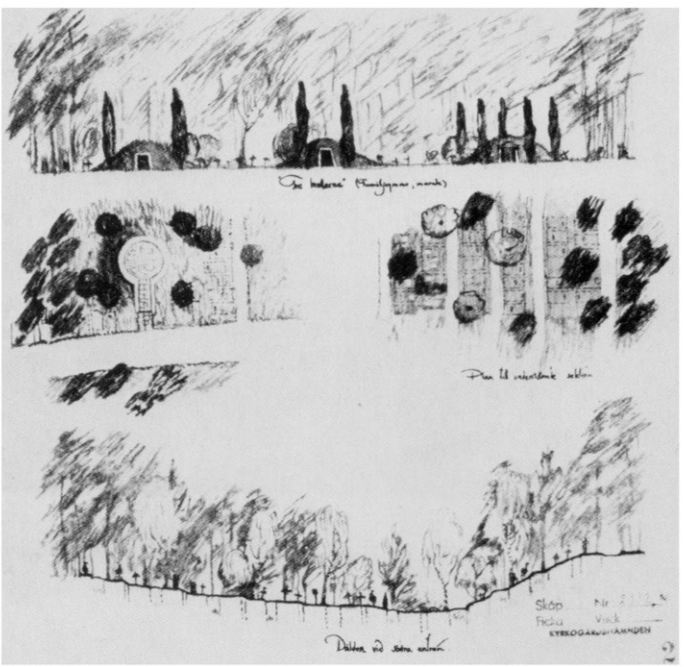
20. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, sketch plan showing layout of graves, with Sigurd Lewerentz.

21. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, with Sigurd Lewerentz; above: "The Three Mounds" (family grave); below: dell at south entrance.



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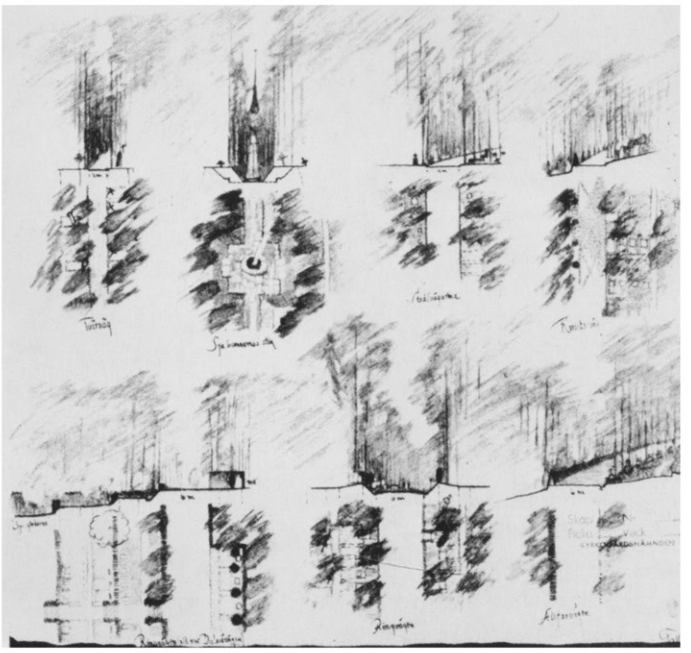
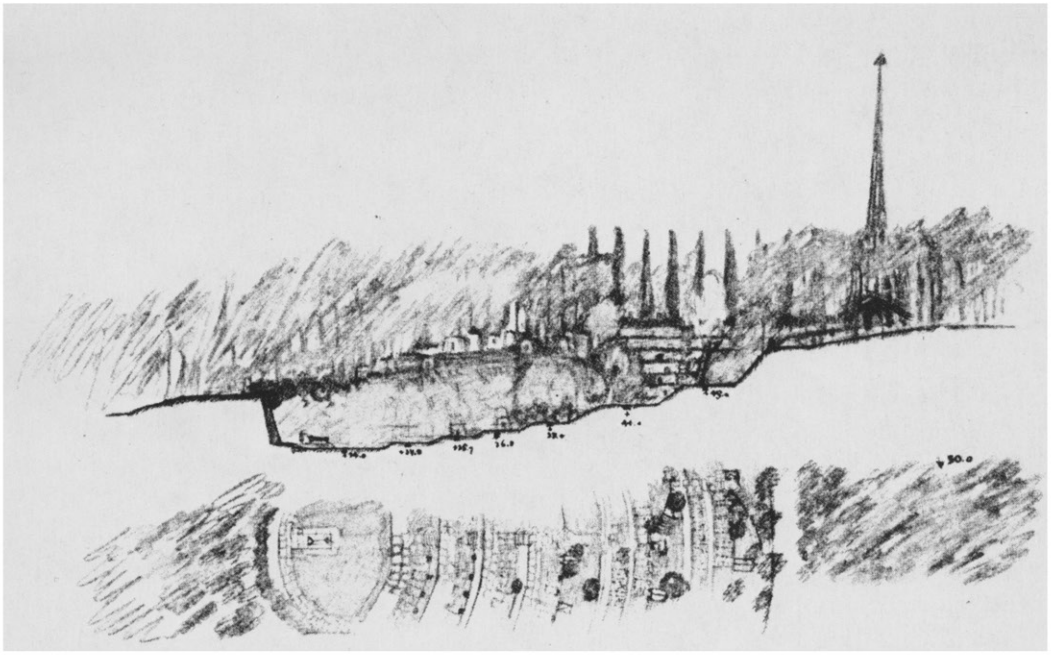


22. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, with Sigurd Lewerentz, road profiles.



23. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, with Sigurd Lewerentz, "The Valley."

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indication that the two architects knew anything of him at this time. So it would appear a question of parallel sensibilities resorting to a general cultural theme that had been important one hundred years earlier.[35] Friedrich, seeking to revitalize the experience of divinity in a secular world, had been a wellspring of the Northern Romantic sensibility in painting, bringing into conscious usage for the first time certain archetypal Nordic landscape images, the deep evergreen forest, the endless sea, the dolmen on the heath surrounded by oaks, and the wayfarer's cross as an element in the landscape.[36] Rather than being naturalistic documentations, Friedrich's landscapes, in their intensely concentrated imagery, took on transcendental and spiritual qualities. Asplund's and Lewerentz's scheme appears to pursue this Nordic imagery in much the same spirit as Friedrich.

Though it went through major changes during the long period of its realization, the project was to retain much of this transcendental mood, but for reasons of space and efficiency the architects had to abandon the idea of graves freely disposed in the forest. However, their final molding of the open landscape at the front of the cemetery represents a masterly intensification of the Friedrichian vision.[37]

The Woodland Chapel

Asplund and Lewerentz agreed to divide up the work for the cemetery. Asplund would design the first chapel, known as the Woodland Chapel, and Lewerentz the second, the Resurrection Chapel.[38] The Woodland Chapel, designed and built in the years 1918–1920, is an important intensification of the romantic naturalism of the competition scheme. Set among a thick grove of fir trees surrounded by a wall, the chapel, with its

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steeply pitched, dark shingle roof, evokes, as Bengt Johansson perceptively noted, something of the overgrown country church lost in the dark forest[39] (fig. 24). But one may also note that, seen frontally, it appears as a pyramid, a primitive Nordic wood version of an Egyptian tomb, levitated, almost floating, above the ground on simple Tuscan columns.

As in the competition entry, the architecture is second to nature. Flanking the front of the chapel, a vault half sunken and covered with earth contains the caskets to be buried that day (fig. 25). It strongly reinforces the somber mood of the totality. Carl Milles's Angel of Death, perched at the edge of the roof, the wrought-iron gates by Asplund, and the keyhole of the outer doors macabrely placed in the eye of a skull, carry the death symbolism further (figs. 26, 27, 28, 29). If the competition gave the first demonstration of it, the chapel confirmed Asplund's genius as an evoker of moods and emotions. But in the studied minimalism and elemental quality of its forms it went far beyond the romantic buildings proposed in the competition.

Asplund's first scheme for the chapel, was a classical temple design. But in 1918 appeared a book, authored by a group of Danish architecture students, containing measured drawings and photos of Liselund, a charming rococo estate in Denmark.[40] That summer Asplund, recently married, bicycled with his wife through Denmark to Liselund. He was particularly struck by the small garden pavilion known as Hytten, with its thatched roof and its simple wooden columns, to the point where it inspired him to change his design for the Woodland Chapel, a fact he happily admitted in reviewing the book in *Byggmästaren.*[41] One may conjecture that what inspired Asplund was the straightforward and unself-conscious combination of the classical and the vernacular

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24. Woodland Chapel, 1918–1920, front.

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25. Woodland Chapel, view from portico toward earth vault.

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26. Woodland Chapel, doors.

27. Woodland Chapel, doors closed with keyhole in the eye of a skull.

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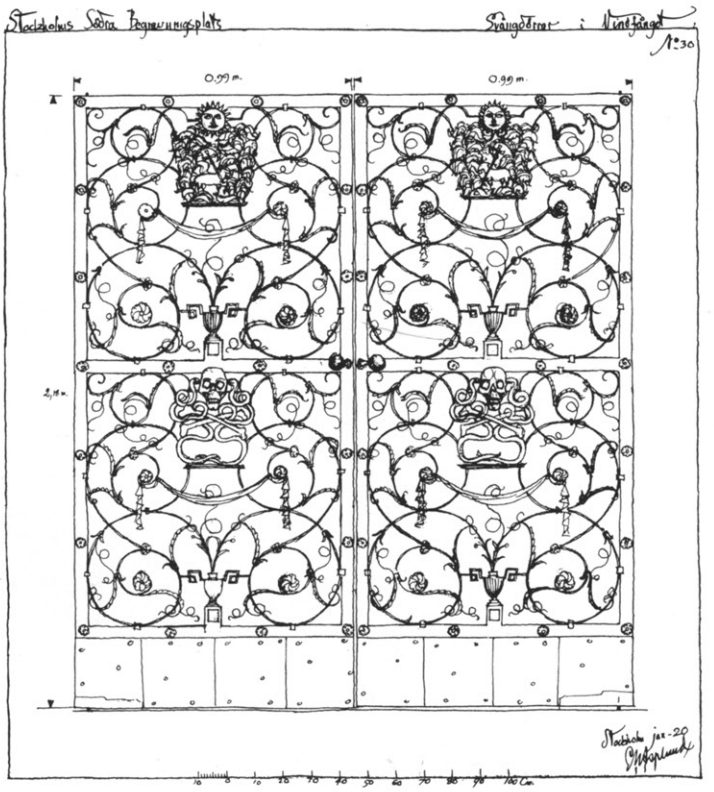
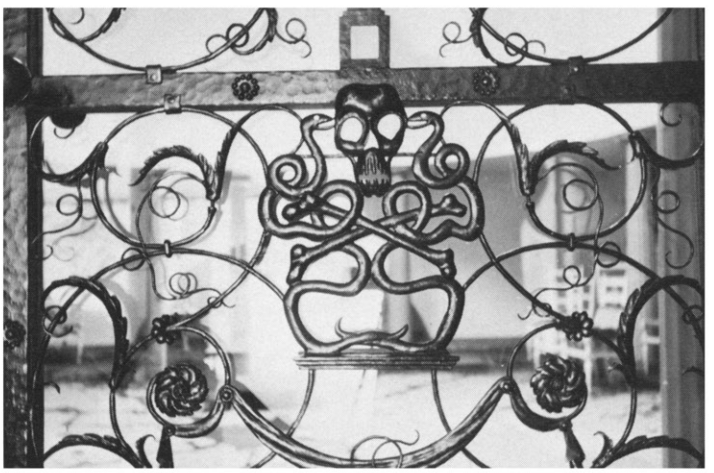


28. Woodland Chapel, drawing, wrought-iron gate.



29. Woodland Chapel, wrought-iron gate, detail.

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that he found in Hytten, as the light mood evoked at Liselund is far from the melancholy atmosphere of the chapel.[42] For the Woodland Chapel represents a similar combination (fig. 30). If the roof recalls the country church and the pyramid (rather than the thatched peasant hut), the plan (fig. 31) and the interior, with its simple Tuscan columns and hemispheric dome, are clearly classical. The intimate chapel also evokes the cave (fig. 32), not only in the skylight at the top of the dome and the vault behind the altar, but also because of the enormous disparity between the large roof and the small dome. This contrast is most clearly apparent in section (figs. 33, 34) but is also experienced strongly in actuality as one moves from outside to inside.

The articulation of the building may reveal the formal basis for this evocative impact. Eliminating all moldings, cornices, and other profiling, Asplund has abstracted solids and space into pure geometric form. Detailing the junction of the pitched roof and the flat ceiling so that they create a continuous flush joint on all sides, he presents the roof as a discrete solid out of which the dome appears to be carved. Although the exterior and the interior are disparate elements, they are unified by the "solid block" of residual space.

The open, columned portico, a gathering place for the bereaved before and after the ceremonies, was to continue as an important motif in Asplund's work. It was to find its most striking form in the great loggia that he designed for the Woodland Crematorium.

Temporary Housing for Workers

Asplund's design of 1917 for temporary housing for workers in Stockholm (fig. 35), done in a wooden vernacular-cum-classical style, combines medieval and classical urban elements. To the north and west the houses

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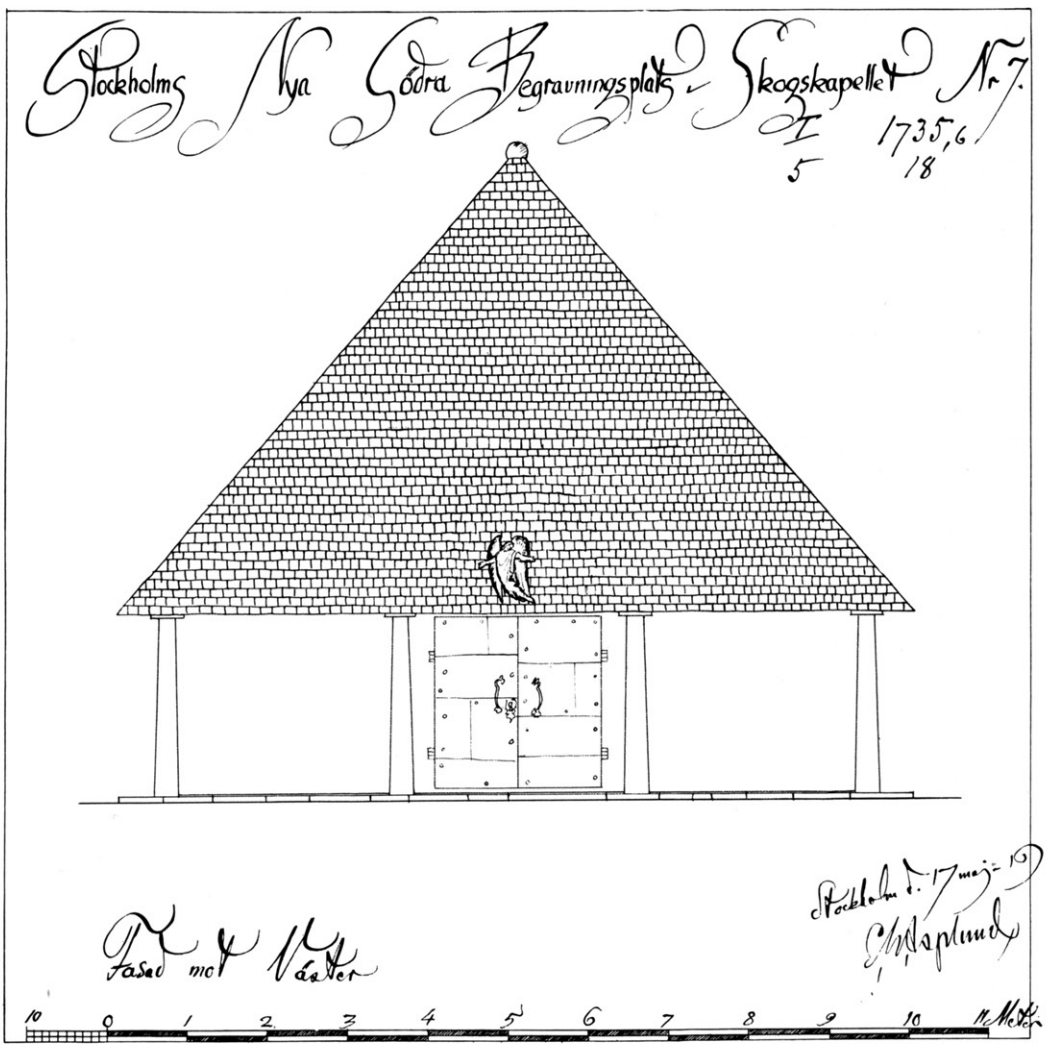

30. Woodland Chapel, drawing, front facade.

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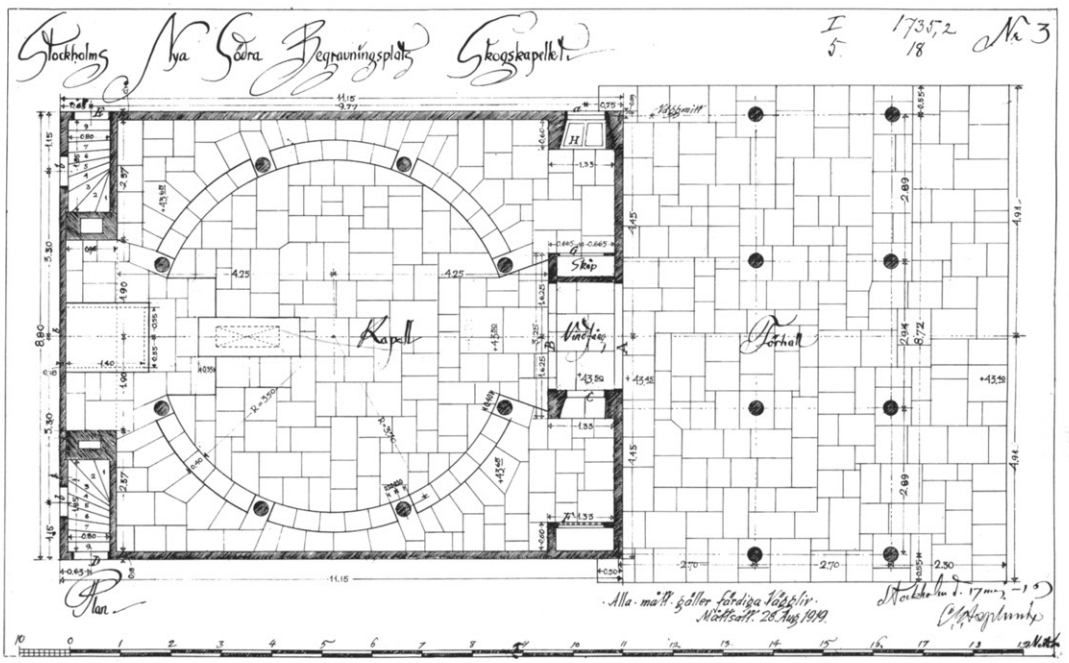
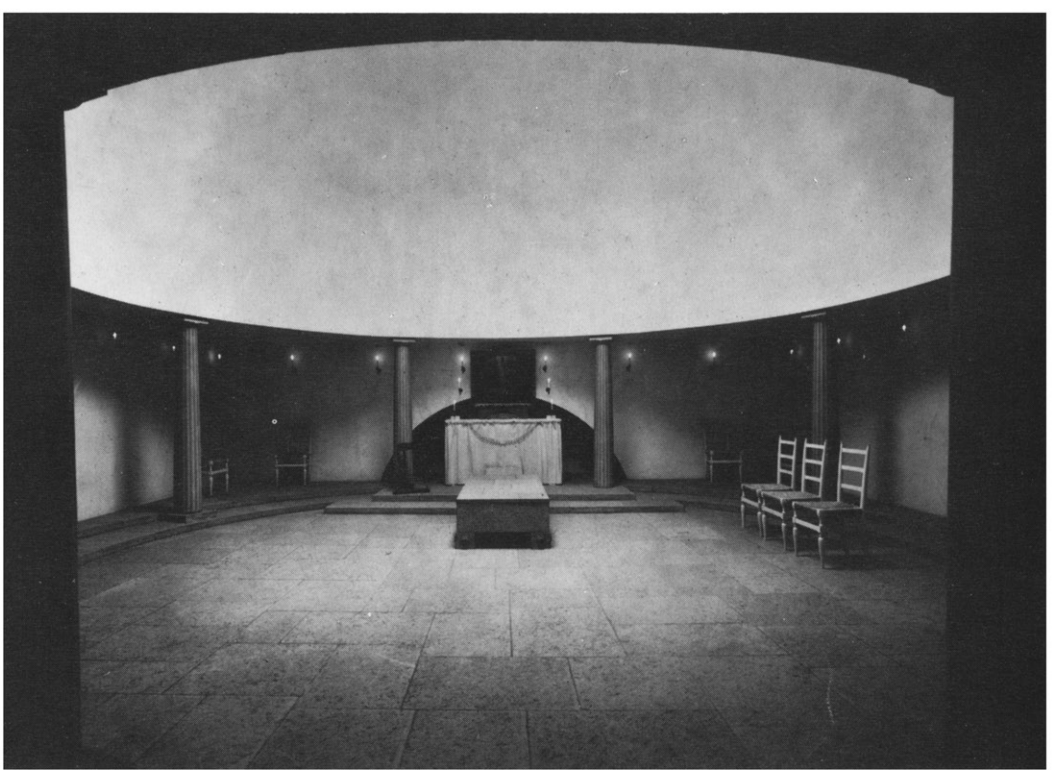
31. Woodland Chapel, plan.

32. Woodland Chapel,
interior.





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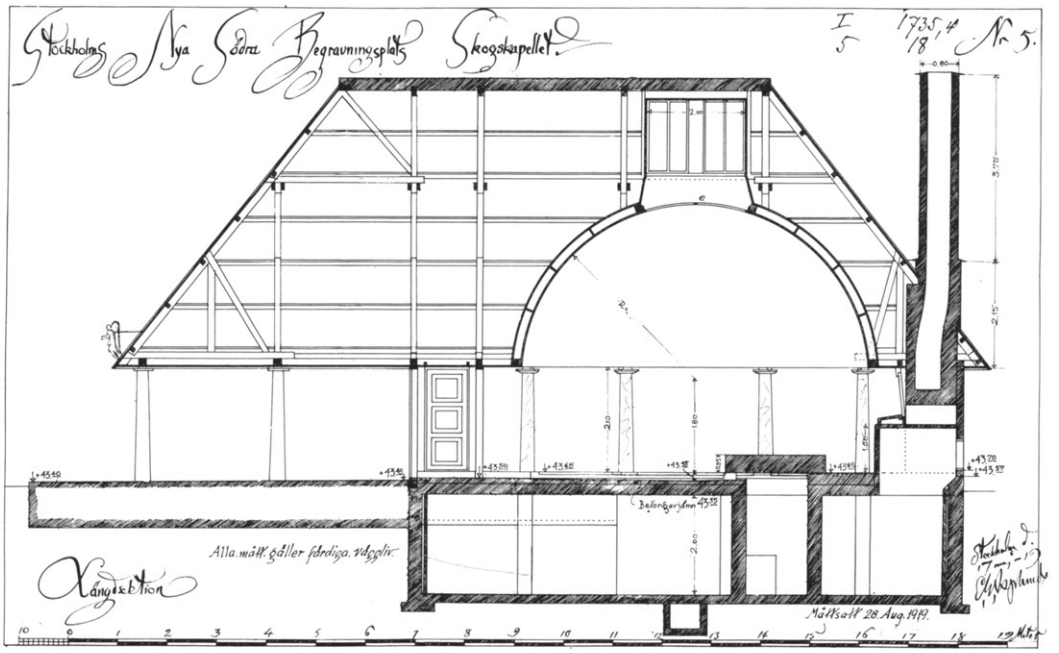

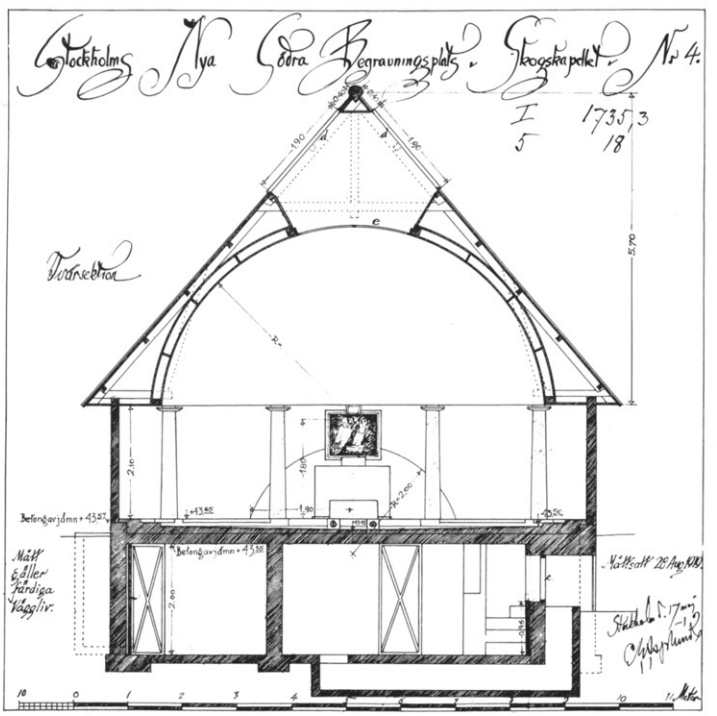

33. Woodland Chapel, longitudinal section.

34. Woodland Chapel, cross section.

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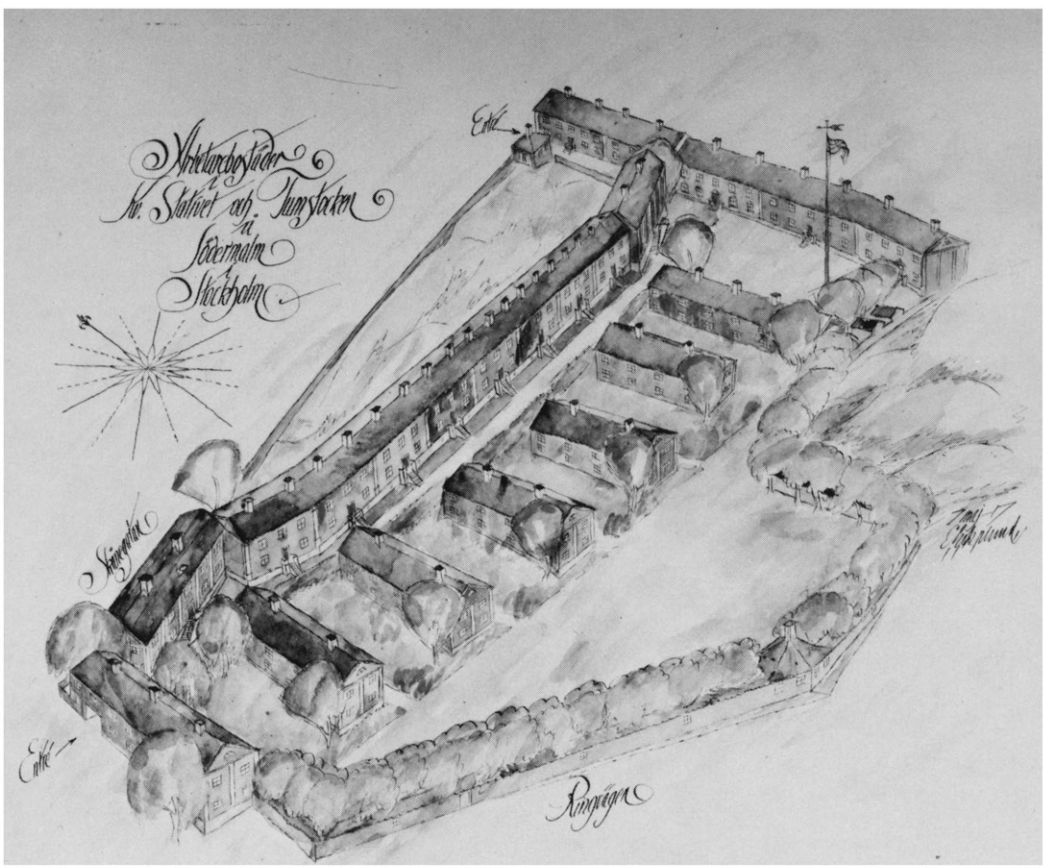

35. Temporary housing for workers, Stockholm, 1917.

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form a gently distorted and twisting wall which shelters a lower series of row houses set in a regular fashion perpendicular to it, much like a classical barracks layout. In the long, continuous, wall, Asplund implemented the subtle limp twists and curves which first appeared in the team project for Norrköping that he did as a student (see chapter 1). As an urban housing solution, the project seems to foreshadow later housing that grew out of the reaction to the rigid "open lamel" layouts of the functionalists.

The Villa Snellman

The Villa Snellman in Djursholm, a suburb of Stockholm, designed and constructed in 1917–1918, is the first built work in which Asplund used in combination certain formal and symbolic themes that run through many of his subsequent designs. The building is in a vernacular-classical vocabulary. In the restrained minimalism of the exterior (fig. 36) and in the modest interior, with hand-painted wooden ceilings and papered walls, the house (fig. 37) owes a debt, as already mentioned, to Elis Benckert's Villa Lagercrantz. Yet Asplund has both a lighter and a more decorative touch than Benckert that may owe something to his knowledge of the work of Joseph Hoffman and Heinrich Tessenow, both of whom had been published in Scandinavia.

A study of the plan of the building (figs. 38, 39) indicates that Asplund has here transformed the medieval layout within a classical shell developed by Östberg into a more rigorous formal motif. For, unlike the Bonnier villa, where the splayed walls are haphazard although functional, the inflected interior walls of Asplund's villa have been subtly incorporated into an overall system where they relate contrapuntally to the skew of the one-story wing. This plan composition as well as the implied

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36. Villa Snellman,
Djursholm, 1917–1918,
garden facade.

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37. Villa Snellman, second floor corridor.

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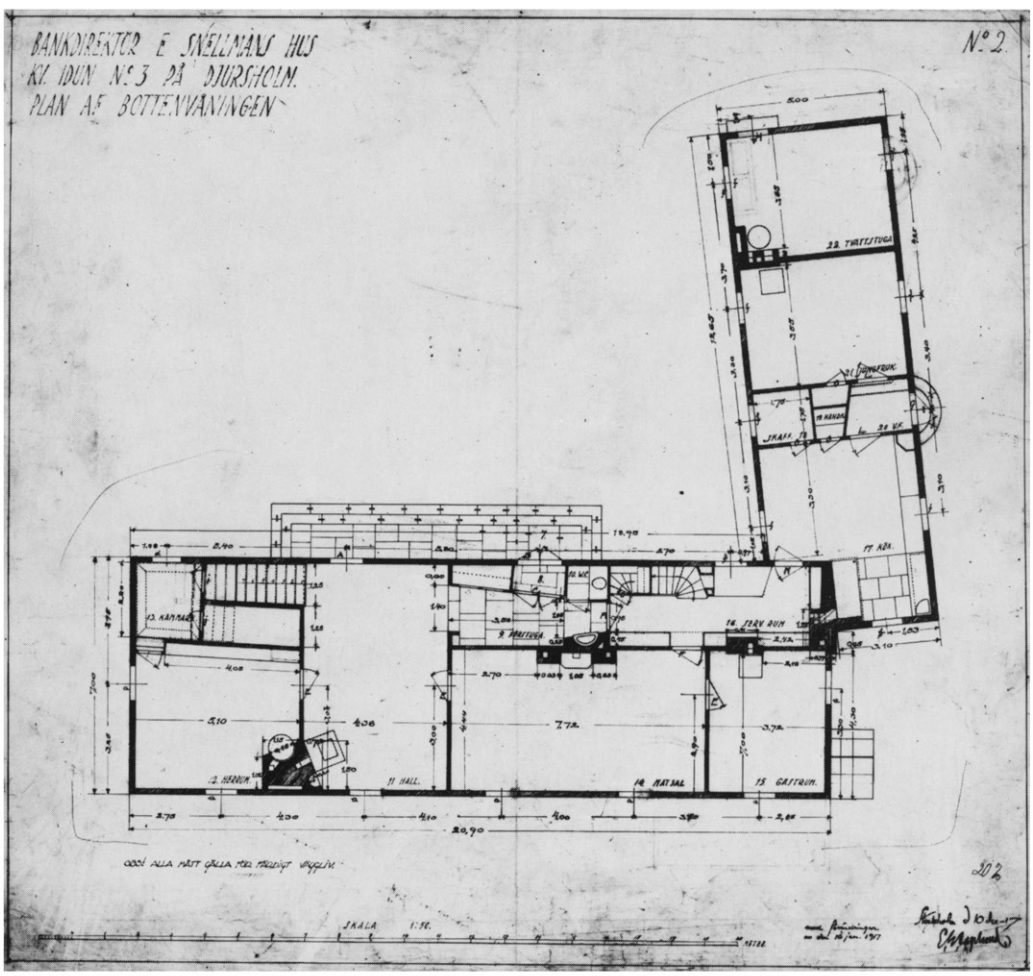

38. Villa Snellman, ground floor plan.

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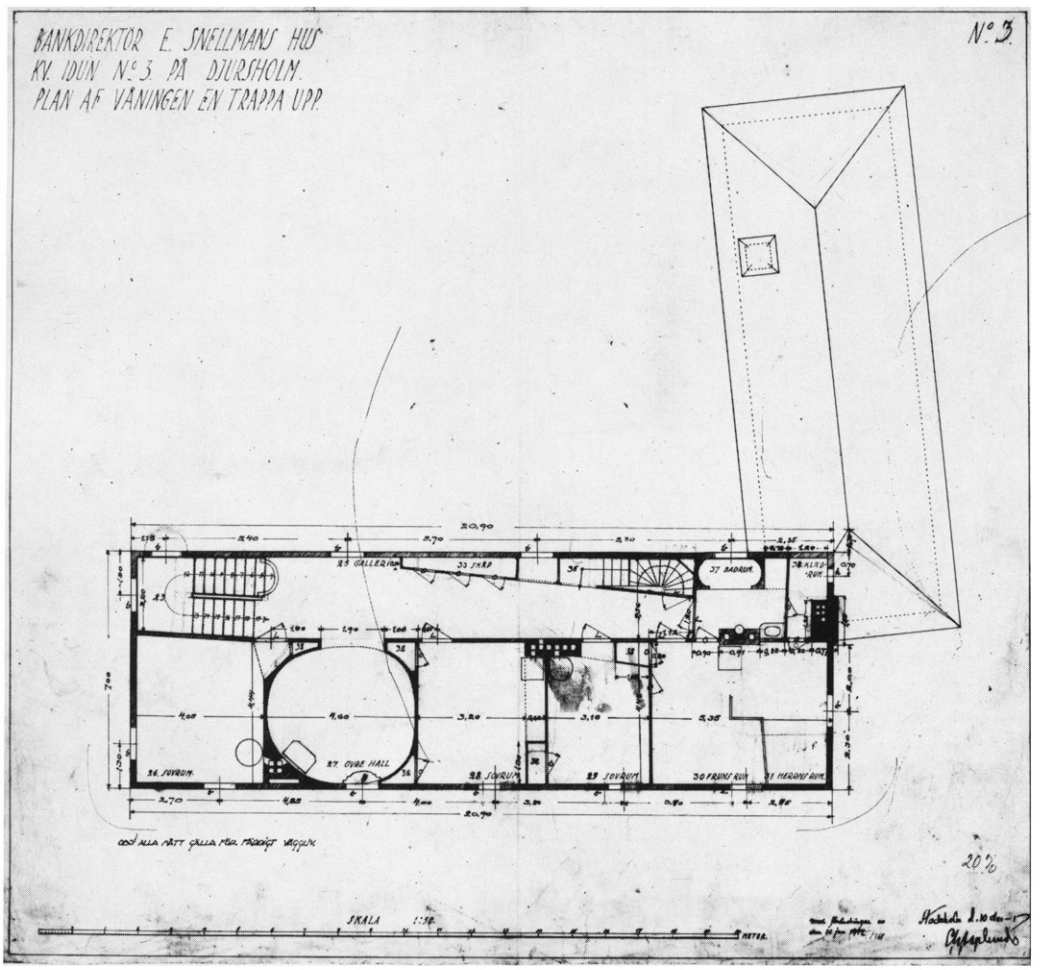

39. Villa Snellman, second floor plan.

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overlap of the two wings gives the plan certain affinities with the formal principles of a cubist collage.[43]

Thus the plan of the Villa Snellman represents a further development of Östberg's plan in two respects. First, while Östberg essentially composed his skewed plans within the context of one massive form, Asplund's plans provide an increased flexibility in that building masses, though interlocked, are defined as separate entities; and second, Östberg's work did not deal formally with compositional correspondences between exterior walls and interior partition walls. Thus in Asplund's hands the compositional system in plan had become both more flexible and more complex.[44]

In addition to the inflected walls, other subtle displacements and distortions have been introduced. Through them Asplund is evoking playful images. By creating a taut building envelope and reducing the scale of the windows, he emphasizes the facade surface, which becomes a tableau. He uses both the facades and the plan to suggest these associations, and to grasp them we must coordinate our reading of the two.

The displacement of the ground-floor windows on the garden side of the house (fig. 40) relates to the skew of the one-story wing as if a force had been applied to move it off the perpendicular and stretch the windows off center. This architecturally unorthodox reading is reinforced by an early sketch plan in which the two wings appear able to swing together as if attached by a pin connection, the protruding terrace of the two-story wing fitting exactly into the recessed terrace of the one-story wing (fig. 41).

The articulation of the end facade toward the street as a face (fig. 42) suggests that Asplund conceived the building as an anatomical metaphor, the skewed interior walls representing a muscular system that might

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activate the one-story wing, the "tail" of the house. This figure is reinforced by the organic, lunglike rotunda on the upper floor, open to the circulation system of the house. The flattening of this form against the rectilinear wall of the bedroom seems to suggest expansion, creating a subtle tension between the rotunda and its rectilinear corset.[45]

The building was originally designed in masonry (figs. 43, 44) but for reasons of economy was executed in wood. Though almost identical to the masonry project, the built version shows some important changes, one being the introduction of the free-form wooden rotunda just discussed, and the other being the elimination of the canopied balcony at the garden side of the house. The displacement of the ground-floor windows on the garden side was also introduced, although a sketch published in Ahlberg's book on Asplund indicates that the motif had been contemplated earlier. It may be argued that the tauter and more flexible appearance of the final plan served to inspire or at least reinforce the reading that Asplund designed into the form.

Another subtle change from one version to the other was of major importance. The living room of the house goes through from the entry to the garden side. It has a set of French doors that open onto a flagstone terrace adjacent to the main entry doors. In the original masonry scheme an iron handrail surrounded the terrace onto which both entries fronted, with a stepped access only by the formal entry. Though the juxtaposition of informal French doors and formal entry was unorthodox, a clear hierarchy was nonetheless established. However, in the built version this handrail has disappeared, making access to both entries equal and placing the burden of orientation on the articulation of the

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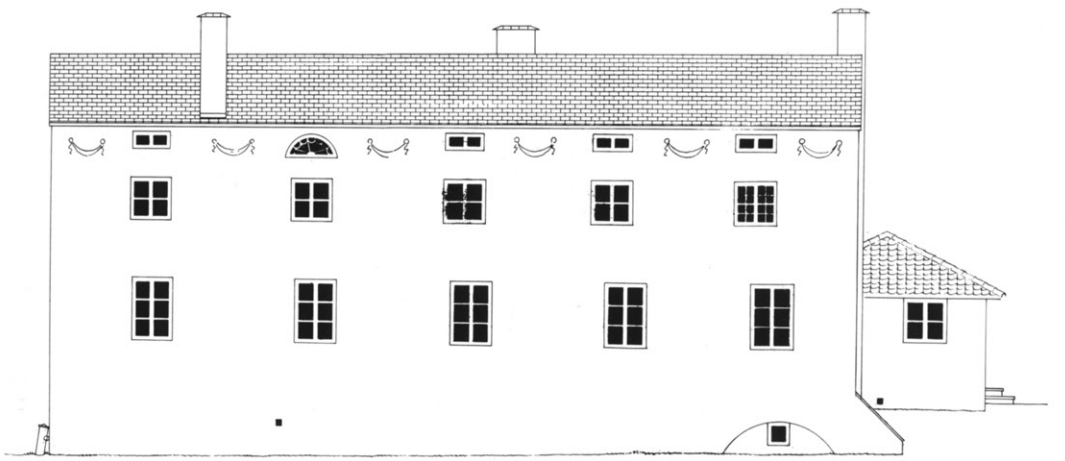
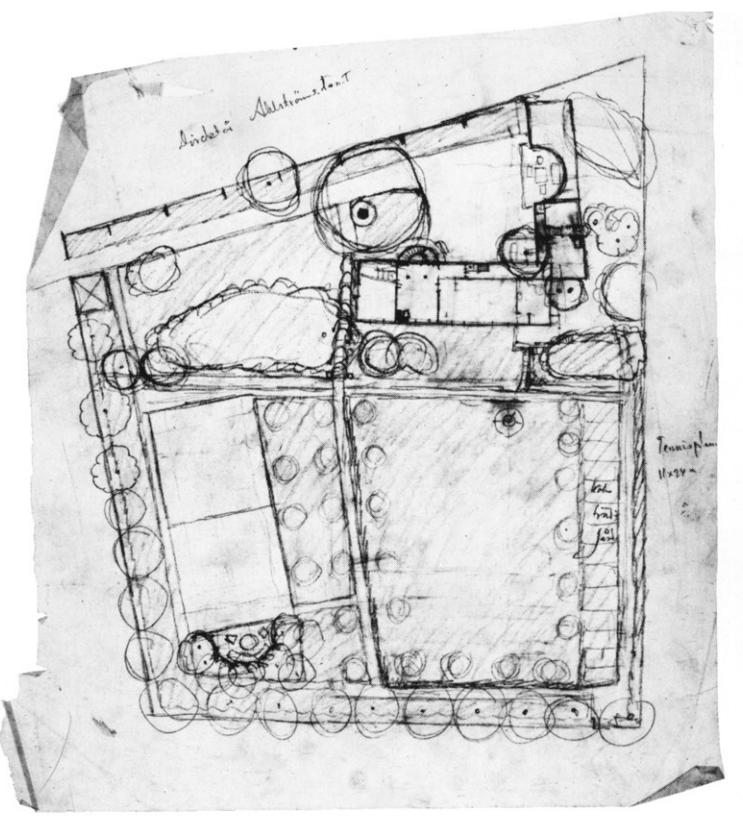
40. Villa Snellman, drawing, garden facade.

41. Villa Snellman, early plan sketch.





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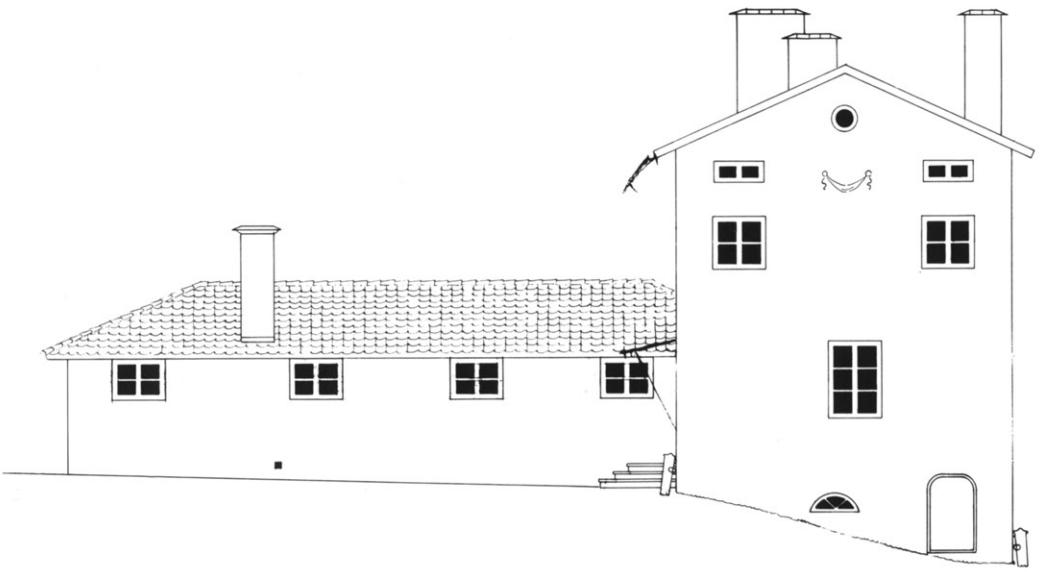

42. Villa Snellman, drawing, end facade toward street.

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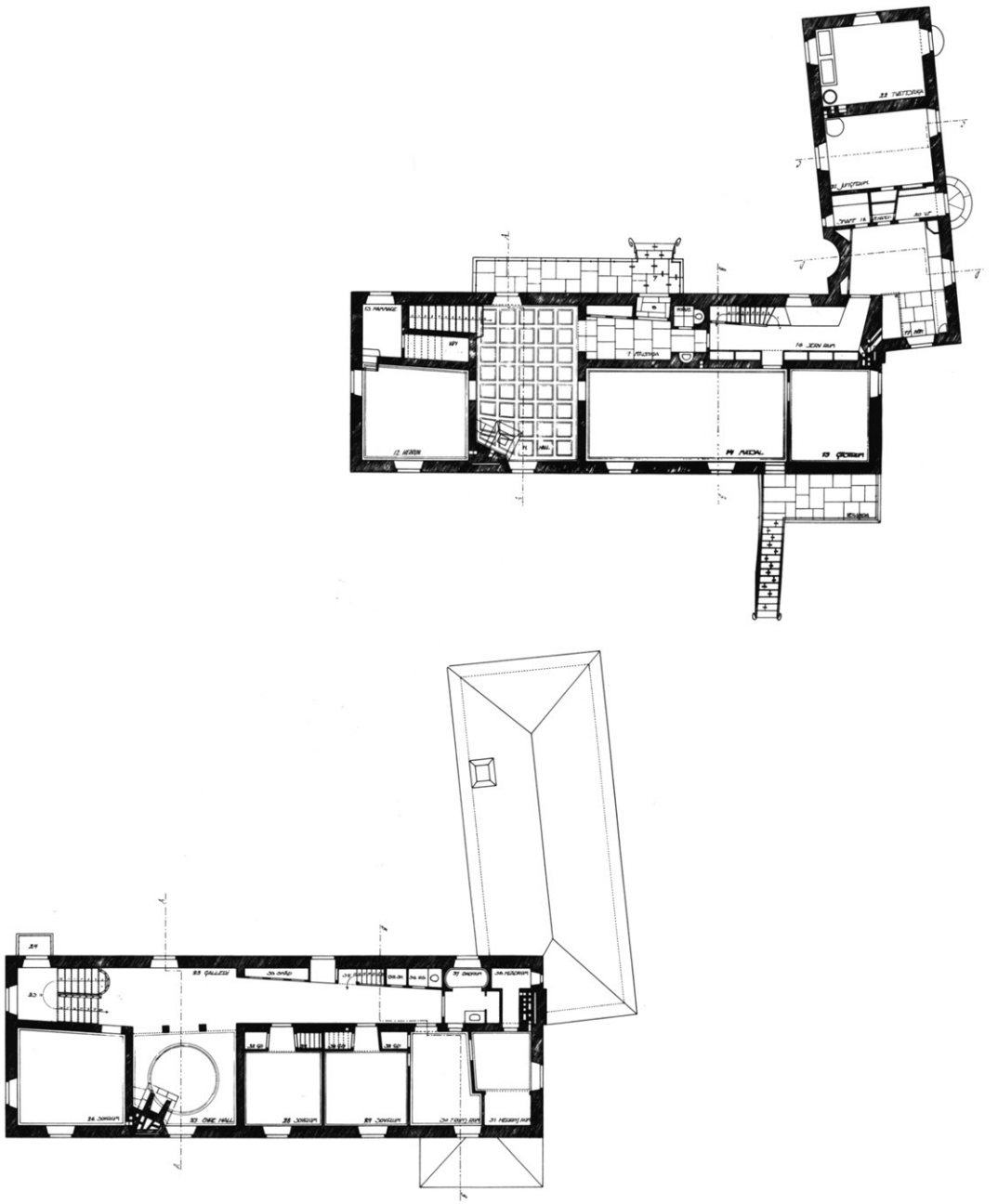
43. Villa Snellman, ground floor plan, masonry version (not built).

44. Villa Snellman, second floor plan, masonry version (not built).



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doors themselves (fig. 45). This semantic conflict is psychologically disturbing, confusing the arriving visitor's sense of boundary between the public and private domain.[46] The closed nature of the facade, putting the doors in stark relief, heightens the sense of enigma (fig. 46). Here, in more concentrated and carefully studied form, we have a strange juxtaposition of entries or passages such as first appeared in the Villa Rosenberg[47] (fig. 17).

Government Grain Silos

In 1917 Gregor Paulsson, the head of the Swedish Arts and Crafts Society, published his important book, *Den Nya Arkitekturen* (The new architecture) which not only presented a clear picture of the architectural developments of the time but also was an ambitious structural analysis of the interrelationship of architecture, the decorative arts, and society. Paulsson's radical, almost Marxian analysis, with its critique of the Swedish situation, received scant attention from the architectural profession at the time.[48] Paulsson was, of course, to make his mark with a vengeance thirteen years later with the planning and execution of the Stockholm exhibition.

Among the illustrations in Paulsson's book is a photo of a midwestern American grain elevator such as Le Corbusier was to use in *Vers une architecture.*[49] It is an interesting coincidence that the same year Gunnar Asplund was called in as architectural consultant to Carl Forssell, engineer and builder, to design a series of grain storage structures at various points around Sweden (most of which have unfortunately been torn down). The task was not altogether welcome in that plans, heights, and locations had already been decided upon and Asplund's task was essentially to design the facades. In describing the buildings in *Byggmästaren,* As-

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plund complained, "In only the minutest ways was it possible to improve the proportions of the buildings and [it was] completely impossible to fit them into their surroundings."[50]

The results are nonetheless interesting (figs. 47, 48). The abnormally tall classical pilasters have generally been regarded as typical examples of Swedish "grace," a term coined by the English critic Morton Shand, the overly attenuated, elegant, and decorative classicism that came to characterize certain architecture in the 1920s in Sweden.[51] But if anything, the tall columns give the building a studied, awkward appearance, rather than a graceful one. I would argue that the impulse behind the design was quite other, that Asplund attempted to evoke the image of his buildings growing. A probable source of inspiration for the structures may be found in the writings of Strindberg, whom Asplund read and admired, in the image of the "growing castle" in the *Dream Play.* The following exchange takes place in the first scene of that work:[52]

THE DAUGHTER: The castle is growing higher and higher above the ground. Do you see how much it has grown since last year?
THE GLAZIER (*to himself*): I have never seen this castle before—have never heard of a castle that grew—but (*to the Daughter, with firm conviction*)—yes, it has grown two yards, but that is because they have manured it—and if you notice it has put out a wing on the sunny side.

Instead of interpreting the tall pilasters as appliqué, they should be read as stretched from more normal proportions, and the awkward height of the buildings as an outgrowth of a building of more normal proportions. That Asplund thought in terms of harvest symbolism is attested to by the sheathed stalks of grain on the roof tied around the weathervane poles and the

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45. Villa Snellman, drawing, entry facade.

46. Villa Snellman, entry facade, detail.

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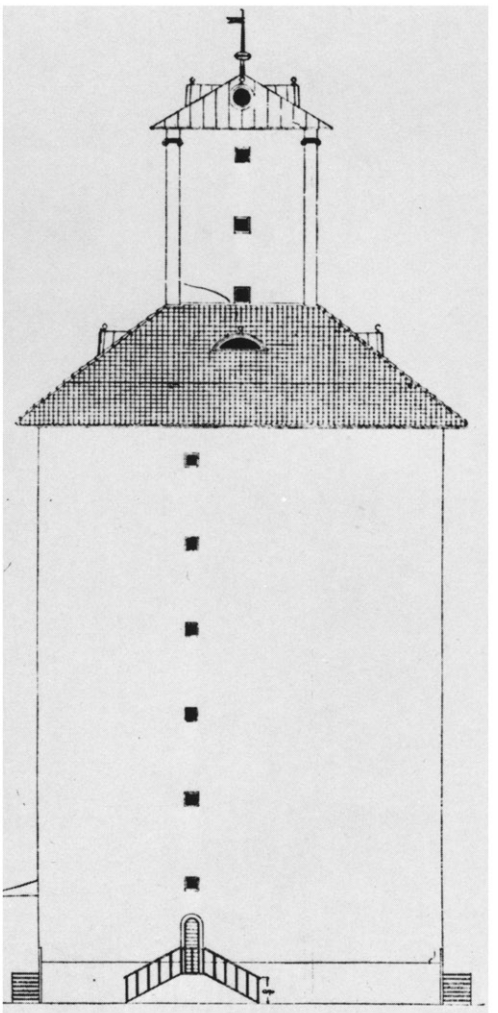
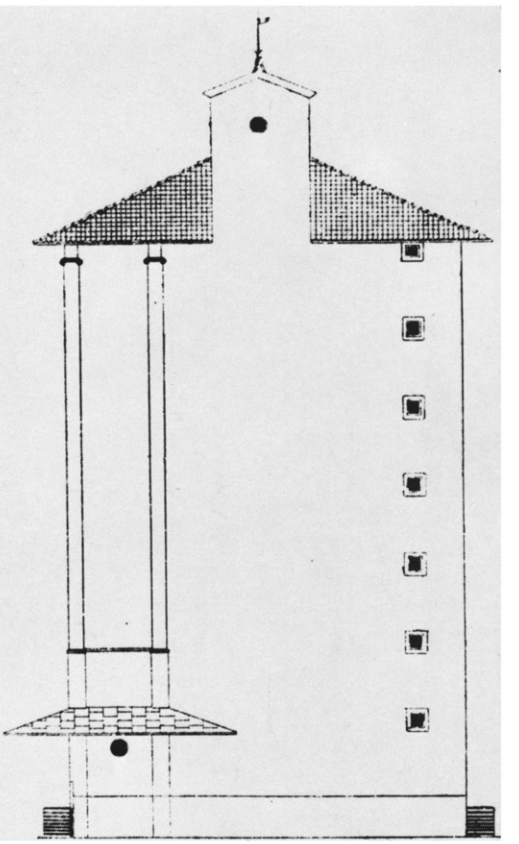
47. Government grain silos, 1917, drawing, facade, with Carl Forssell.

48. Government grain silos, second type, drawing, side facade, with Carl Forssell.





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flower-petal trim of the round window on one of the buildings.[53] In much the same manner as the windows on the garden facade of the Villa Snellman were displaced to suggest a horizontal stretching of the facade membrane, the elongated pilasters of the grain storage structures suggest a vertical stretching. Yet whether the buildings altogether successfully evoked this metaphor of growth is questionable.

In the use of Eternit panels and strip windows on their side facades, the buildings, both in their structure and facade articulation, foreshadowed the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930. The fusion of the vernacular and the classical has here become the attempted fusion of the classical and the modern industrial. Asplund was to make a somewhat similar and more successful attempt with the Carl Johan school in Gothenburg.

Lister County Courthouse

Like the Villa Snellman and the Woodland Chapel, the Lister County Courthouse of 1917–1921 in the small town of Sölvesborg in southern Sweden fuses classical and vernacular motifs. With its wide, gabled front and its vaulted entrance, the building probably drew inspiration from classical prototypes such as Palladio's Villa Valmarana, at the same time attempting a more modest facade articulation to blend into the Swedish small-town surroundings. The juxtaposition of scale—monumental vaulted entry with small domestic windows—in what in fact is a very small building gives the front facade a certain powerful if uneasy monumentality (figs. 49, 50). Asplund may have purposely striven for this slightly awkward provincial appearance.

Terminating a tree-lined allée which begins at the nineteenth-century railroad station (fig. 51), the courthouse mimics the station's vaulted entrance, setting up a correspondence between the two otherwise totally

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dissimilar buildings, a subtle and poetic means of creating a unified but diverse urban landscape.

The interior of the rectangular building is dominated by the circular courtroom, whose rounded form projects not only into the lobby (fig. 52) but also out the back of the building (figs. 53, 54). Two service stairs curve along the outer walls of the courtroom, leading from the back yard to the judge's and caretaker's apartments upstairs.

The series of balusters lining the pews and judges' desks are the most striking feature of the interior of the courtroom (figs. 55, 56, 57). Fat and distended to the point of appearing pregnant, they are an unexpected element in the sober courtroom. Other elements which may or may not have been intentional but which appear consistent reinforce the image evoked by the balusters. The decorative trim of the lobby benches takes on the profile of a pregnant stomach, and the ceiling lamps in the lobby give the impression that the glass globes are about to fall because of their weight (fig. 52).

An examination of the plan reveals that it evokes similar images. A conventional reading might suggest that the round courtroom protruding from the back of the building is a response to the directional force of the allée. But the awkward relationship of circle to rectangle reinforced by the side walls of the lobby, which are splayed, suggests the possibility of an internal force pressing the circular courtroom out of the rectangle, or, to make the image consistent, that the rectangle is giving birth to the circle. The idea is further expressed by the cascading front stairs and by the tautness of the building membrane itself, which evokes internal tensions.

The allusion to pregnancy and birth in this project appears playful, even willful, to the point of approach-

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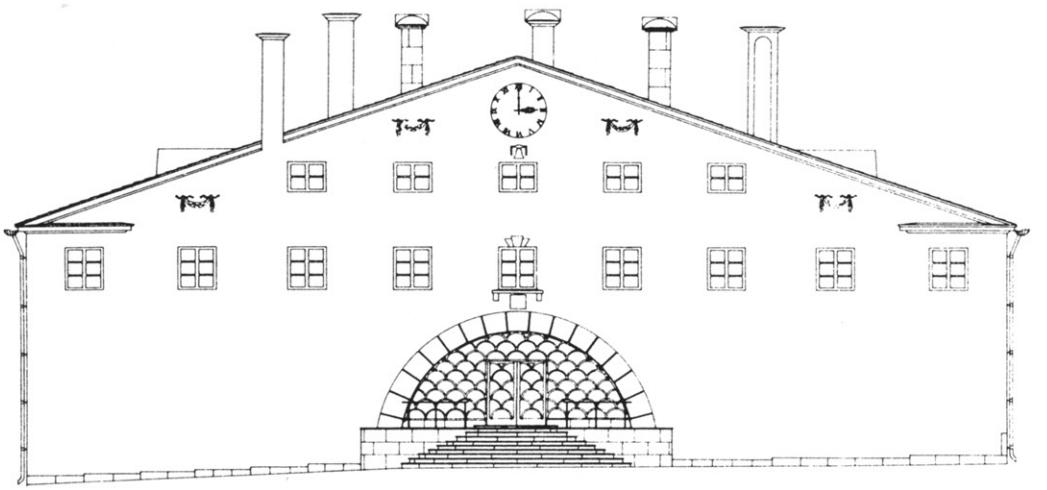

49. Lister County Courthouse, Sölvesborg, 1917–1921, front facade.

50. Lister County Courthouse, drawing, front facade.

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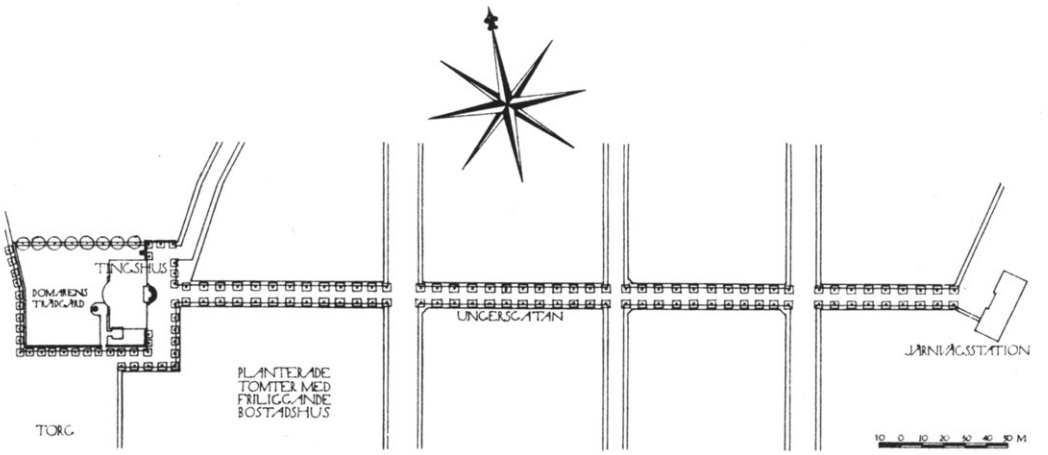

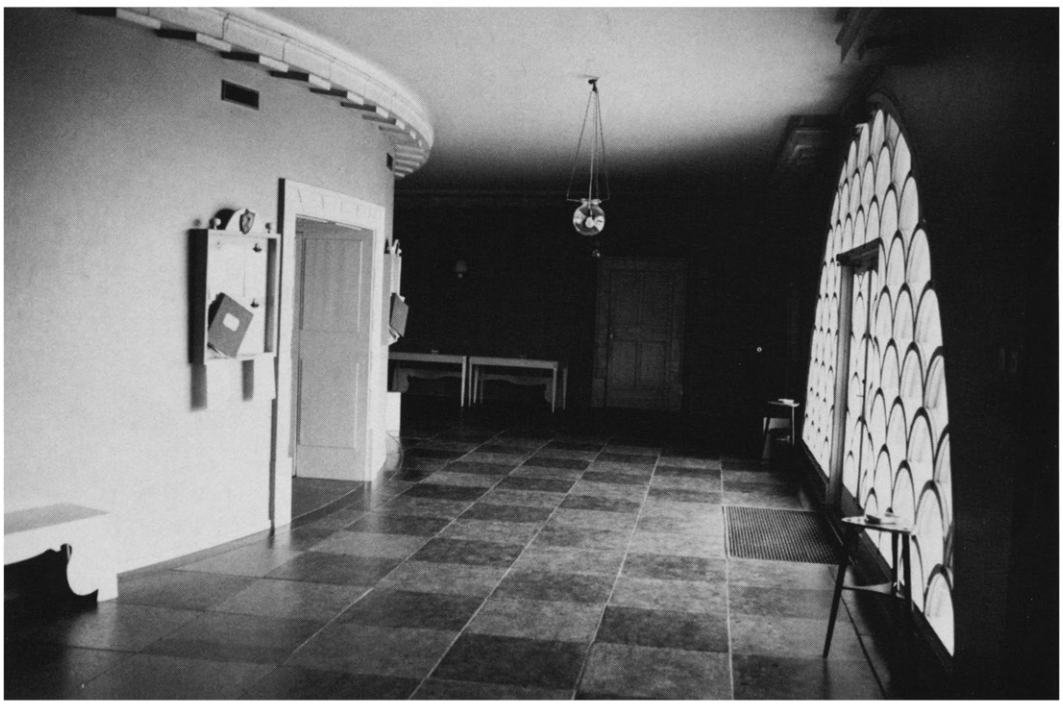

51. Lister County Courthouse, site plan.

52. Lister County Courthouse, lobby.

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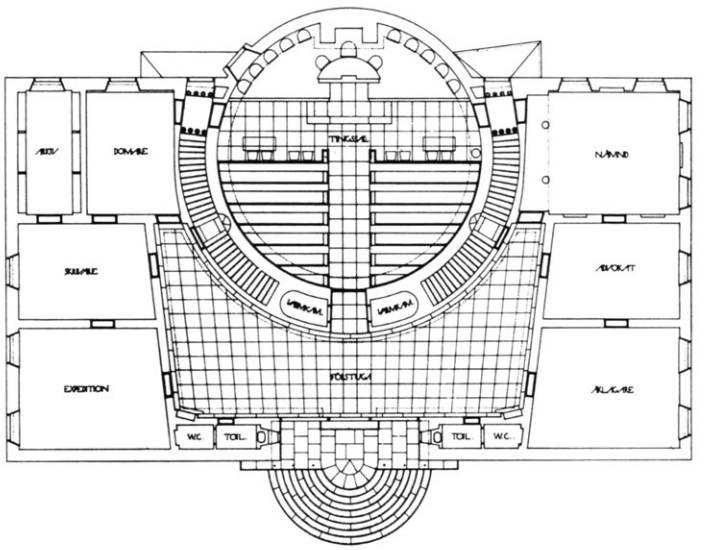
53. Lister County Courthouse, plan.

54. Lister County Courthouse, section.



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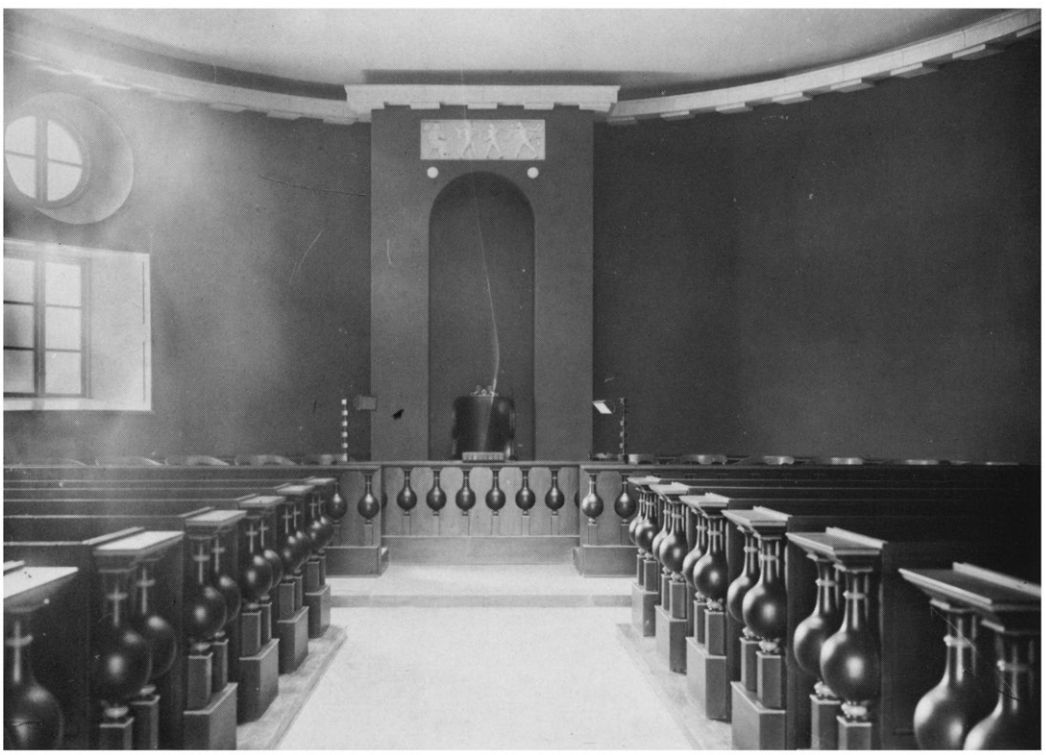
55. Lister County
Courthouse, courtroom.

56. Lister County
Courthouse, judge's desk.



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57. Lister County
Courthouse, balusters, detail.

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ing the bizarre. The imagery bears no discernible symbolic relationship to the function of the building.[54] Yet the all-too-obvious balusters deny that the motif developed altogether unconsciously. The courthouse is important in Asplund's production, for here he extended the range of architectural elements to lamps and decorative trims, with which he conjured up images, adding levels of meaning to his work. In subsequent projects he was to do it with more appropriate symbolic associations.

Carl Johan School

In 1915 Asplund received second prize in the competition for the Carl Johan School in Gothenburg. The Commission, however, was eventually awarded to him, and the building was finally constructed in 1923–1924. Designed for an urban site and as an addition to an existing school, it consisted of a major four-story wing and a lower two-story wing with only a minimal corner connection (fig. 58). The main entrance is on the end facade facing the street (fig. 59).

The building represents a curious fusion of a classical, utilitarian prototype and a modernist Austro-German architectural vocabulary. Though the hipped roof and the cornice follow classical precedent, the proportioning and spacing of the windows on the long facade are a significant transformation (figs. 60, 61). Rather than the vertical inset windows typical of the style, Asplund has designed square, tightly spaced windows, flush with a facade.[55] Each window is subdivided into smaller squares, giving the distinct impression that the facade has been organized on a sheet of graph paper. If the planar surface and the invocation of the grid derive from Joseph Hoffman the use of brick has both German parallels, in the work of Behrens, and clear precedents in classical work in Denmark. Unlike those

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two architects, who strove for an overall harmony while attempting to modernize the classical vocabulary, Asplund was, one senses, deliberately creating a tension between the classical building mass and the modernist facade.

In the interior Asplund cultivated a solemn atmosphere. Drinking fountains in the shape of Greek vases are dramatically silhouetted against the window walls at the ends of the long corridors (fig. 62). The ceiling lamps echo their form. The series of student storage units set into the walls of the corridor again brings to mind the work of Hoffman, Behrens, and other pre–World War I architects.

Though the appearance of these influences at such a late date may be interpreted as an indication of how far behind Scandinavian architecture was at the time, I believe this would be a mistake. The Carl Johan School is neither a late pastiche of prewar Austro-German architecture nor a provincial hybrid, but, like Asplund's other projects from this period, a carefully and purposefully conceived integration of two architectural vocabularies, done to satisfy both formal and symbolic goals.

Urban Projects and Concerns

Asplund devoted considerable effort during the years 1916–1923 to a series of competitions for major urban complexes in Stockholm and Gothenburg. His first urban competition was for the design of Göta Square in Gothenburg with a program calling for an art museum, a theater, and a concert hall. In an article in *Byggmästaren* in 1916 entitled "Present-day Architectural Dangers for Stockholm: Apartment Buildings,"[56] Asplund, after decrying the unharmonious and overelaborate appearance of contemporary apartment buildings, went on to inveigh against those mammoth projects in which

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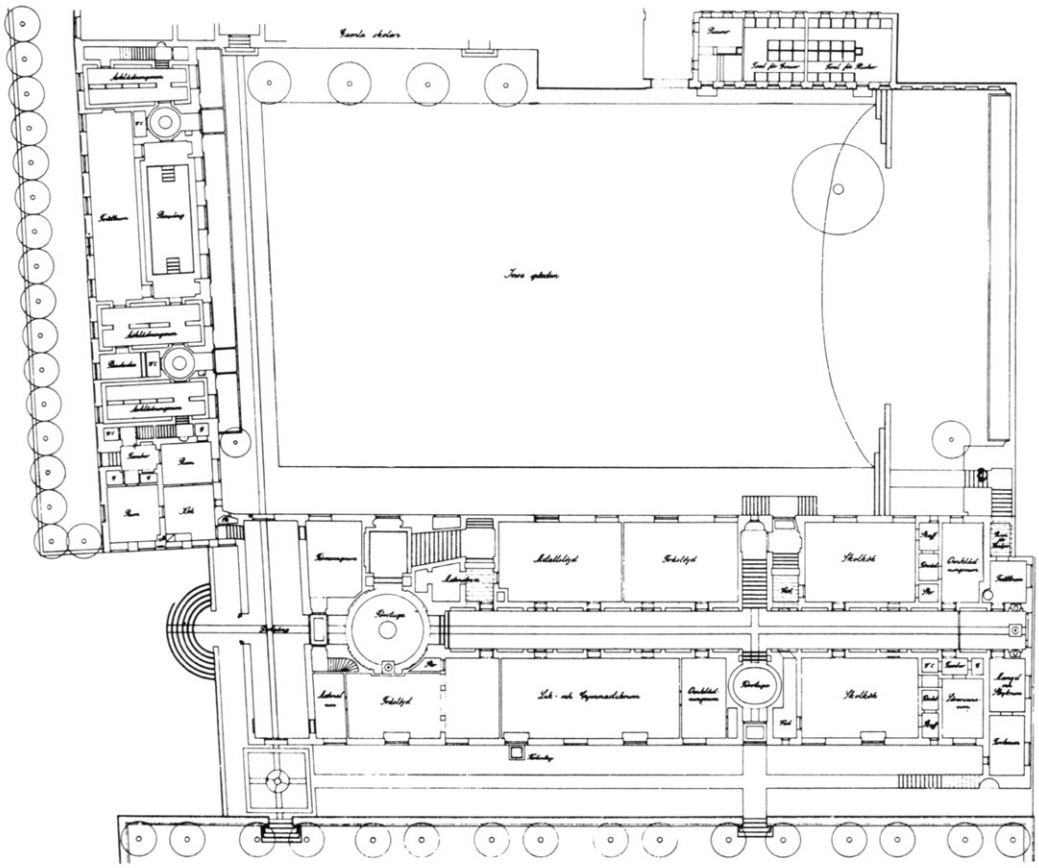

58. Carl Johan School, Gothenburg, 1915–1924, plan.

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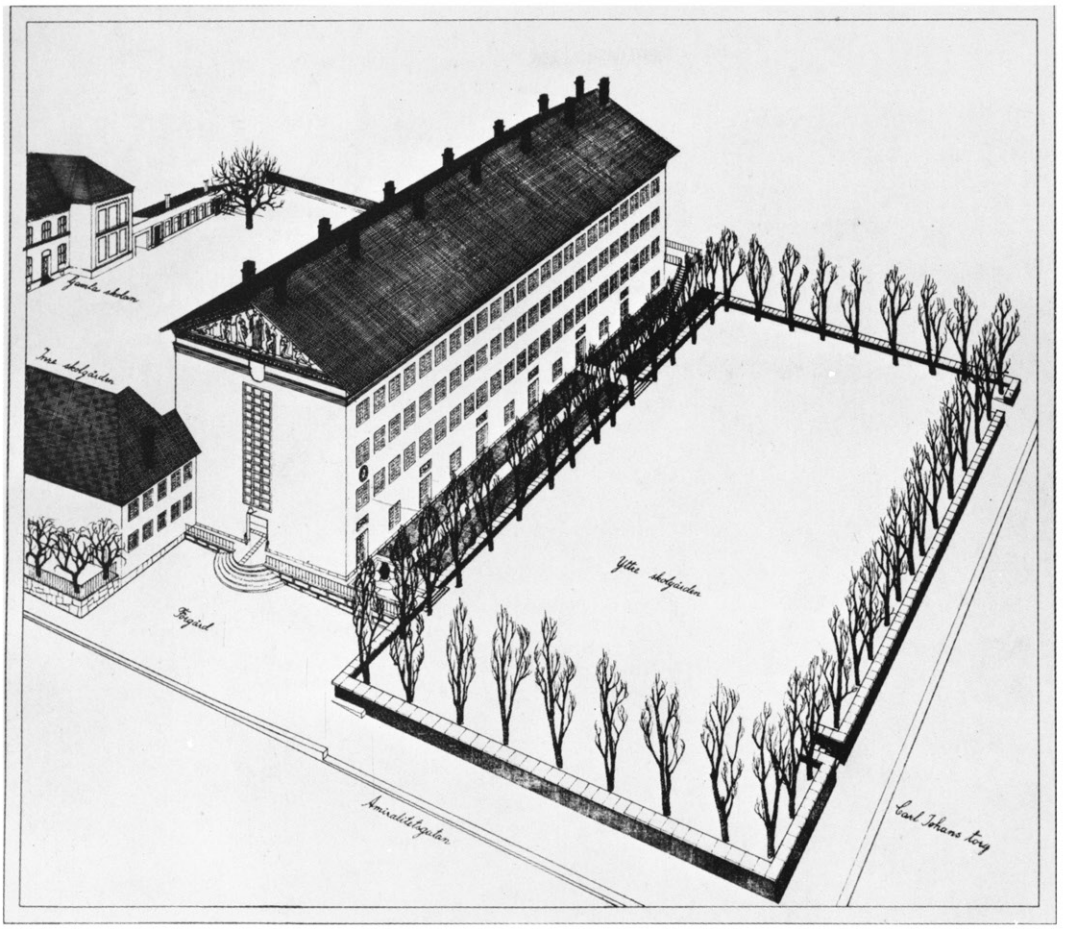

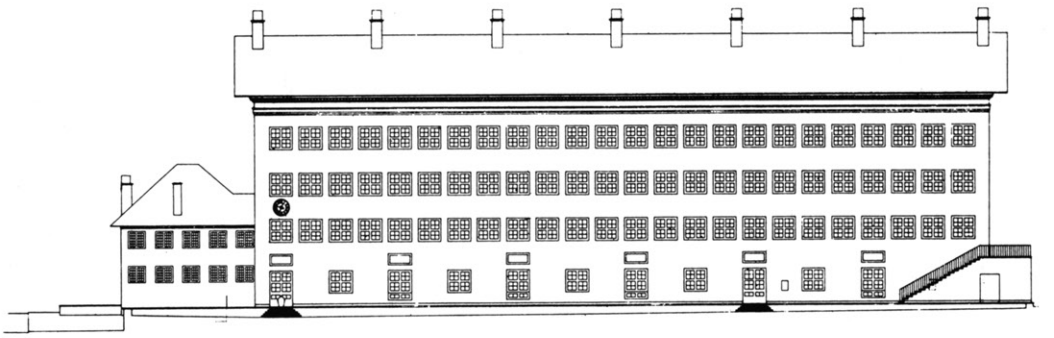

59. Carl Johan School, isometric drawing, exterior.

60. Carl Johan School, drawing, long facade.

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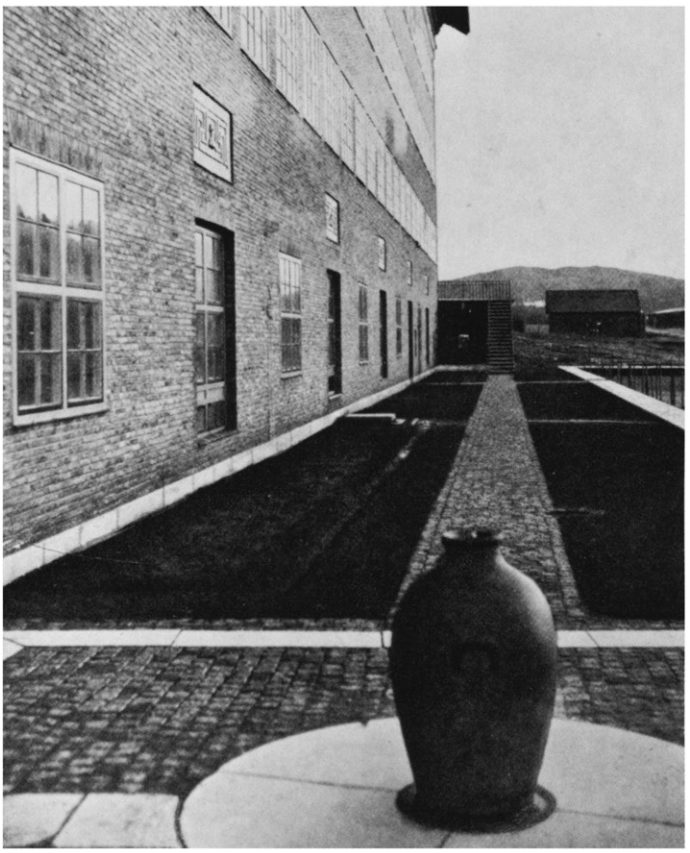
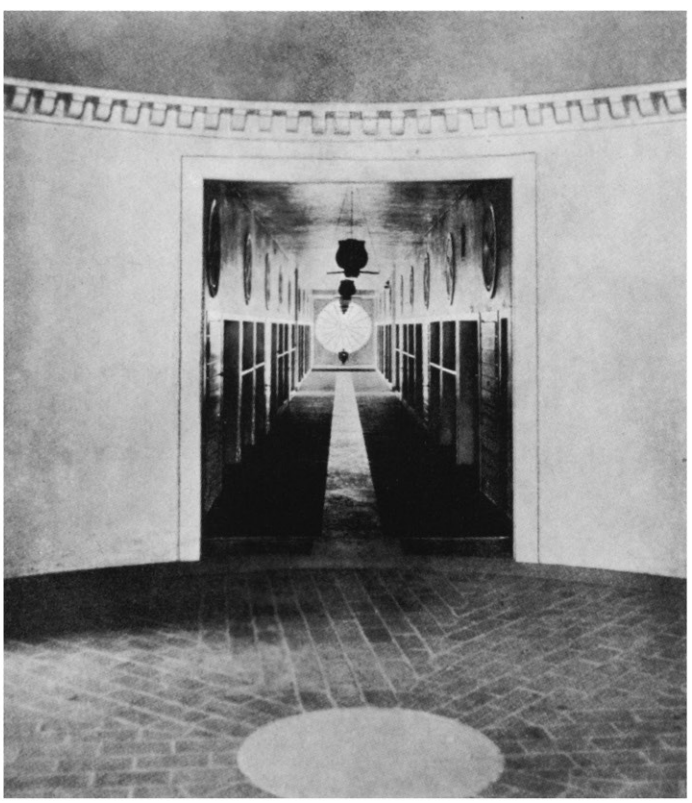


61. Carl Johan School, exterior showing drinking fountain.



62. Carl Johan School, ground floor corridor.

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one building covered an entire block. The block was too large an entity, he maintained, to be articulated as one building. It needed to be visually broken down into smaller but unified elements. This he proceeded to do in the Göta Square competition. Whereas most of the competitors designed the project as three to five separate buildings, Asplund articulated nine, but at the same time tied them into tightly unified street facades on both sides of the square (fig. 63). The centerpiece of the design, the art museum, was the only building to receive a distinct and monumental treatment, with a powerful, neoclassical colonnade which did not altogether mesh with the delicate provincial Italian classicism of the side buildings.[57] The project did not receive a prize, the jury finding its closed character at odds with its north-south orientation.

The next year, 1918, Asplund participated in an invited competition for the arrangement of Gustaf Adolf Square, also in Gothenburg. It was natural that he should have been invited, as he had won the competition for the law courts facing the square a few years earlier. That project, in the National Romantic style, had transformed the existing courthouse and had totally broken with the character of the square. Now Asplund was working in a classical mode, and his approach to urbanism had evolved. He not only designed an addition to the courthouse in a manner sympathetic to the existing classical building, but his design for the buildings on the long north side of the square picked up the same scale and vocabulary. The north side of the block, the stock exchange, was essentially one building, which Asplund articulated as three. But in a 1924 scheme he reversed the 1918 design, providing instead a rigorously classical colonnade in front of the whole facade.

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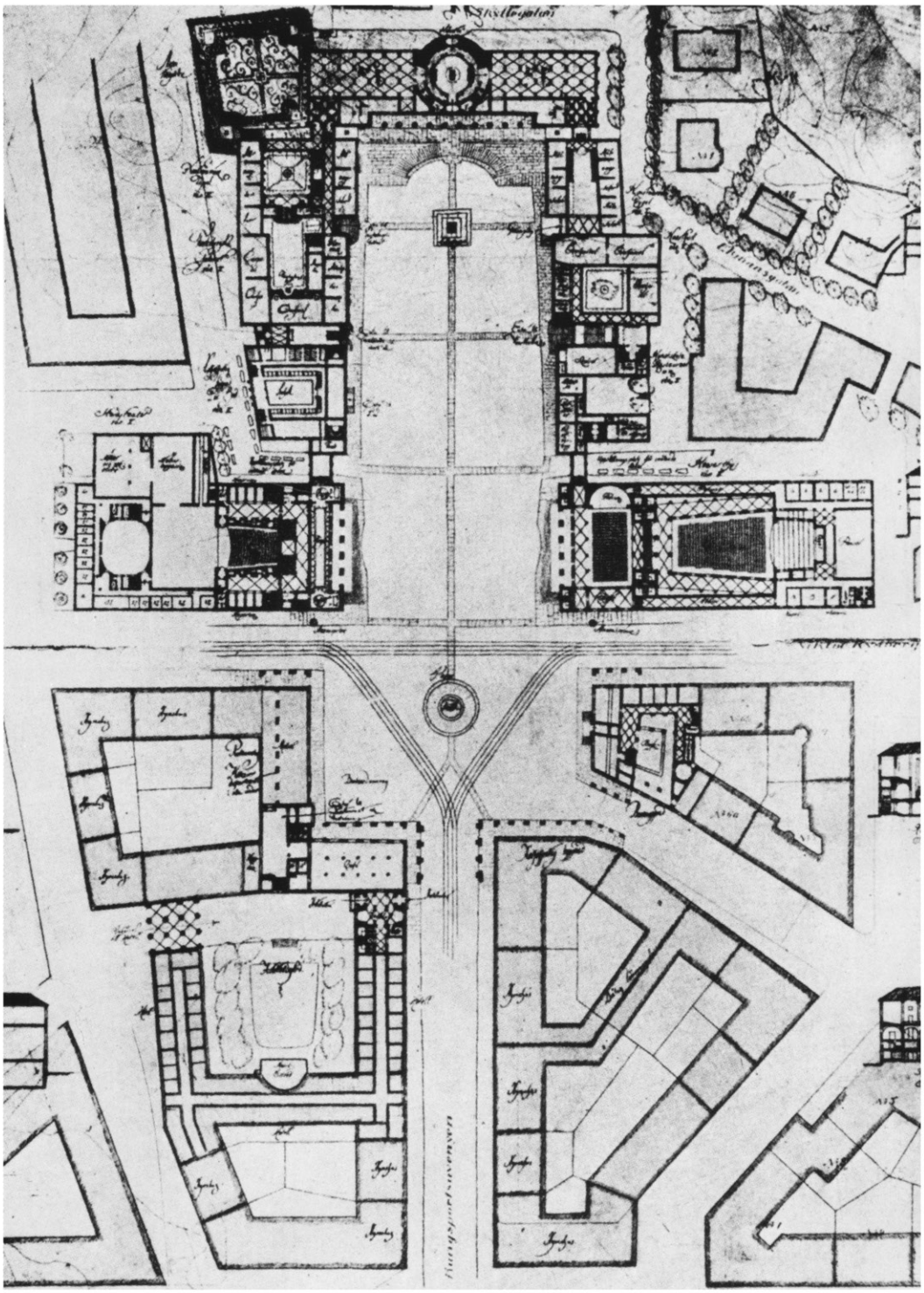

63. Competition entry, Göta Square, Gothenburg, 1917, site plan.

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Asplund was equally concerned about giving the north side of the square a more enclosed feeling. In an earlier proposal of 1915, his first in a classical style, he had splayed out a portion of the stock exchange block diagonally across from the law courts, attaching the two buildings at the corner with a bridge over the street, closing off that end completely (fig. 64). A similar effort for the north side of the square figured in the 1918 scheme, where he proposed to bridge the wide street, Östra Hamn street, with two arches through which traffic would pass. As Hakon Ahlberg points out in his essay on Asplund, there remains an element of mise-en-scène in the various proposals for Gustaf Adolf Square and for Göta Square, a liking for the Italian concept of *facciata.*[58] Although the projects are richer and more appropriately scaled than those of the other competitors, they are orchestrated with readily interchangeable historical motifs.

The one original and superbly elegant feature (although never realized) of the various proposals for Gustaf Adolf Square was Asplund's proposal for paving it, which accompanied his 1924 project (fig. 65). He created an overall pattern of outline squares evenly spaced and connected to each other at the midpoints of their sides. Superimposed on this rectilinear pattern in a skewed orientation, one tip touching the base of the statue of Gustaf Adolf, was an outline map of medieval Gothenburg. The 1915 project shows an as yet overly romantic version of this paving plan, which lacks the compositional rigor of the final version.

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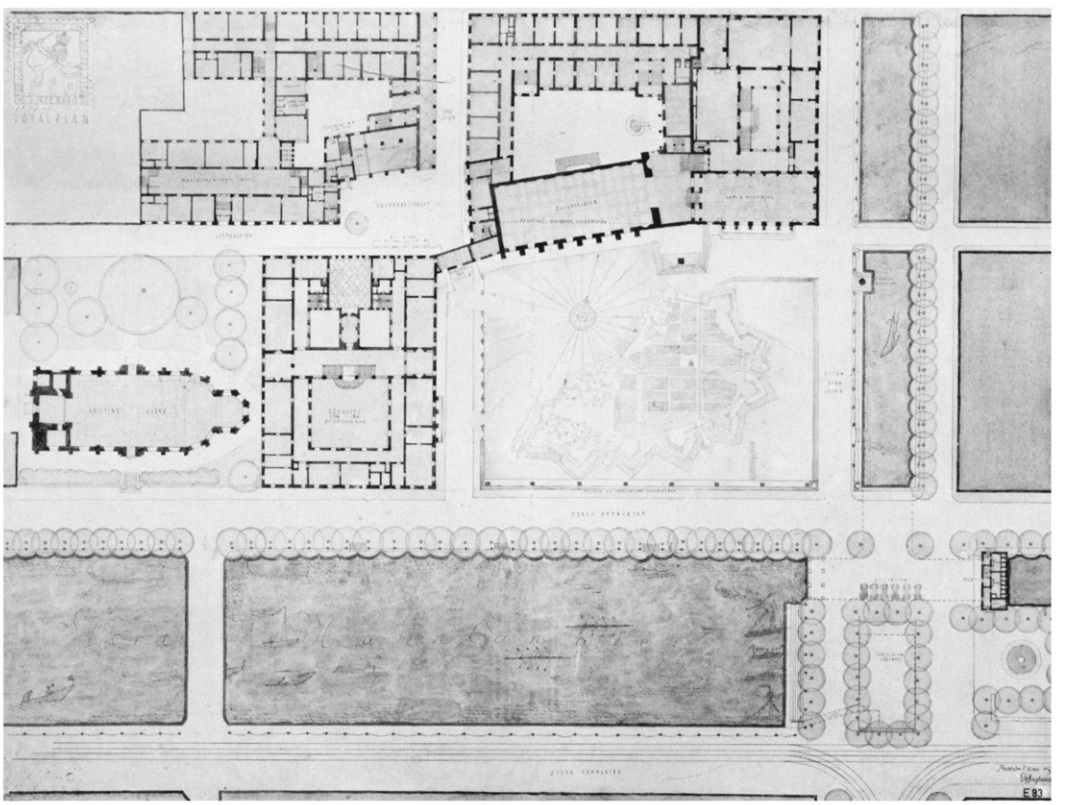

64. Proposal for rearranging Gustaf Adolf Square, Gothenburg, 1915, site plan.

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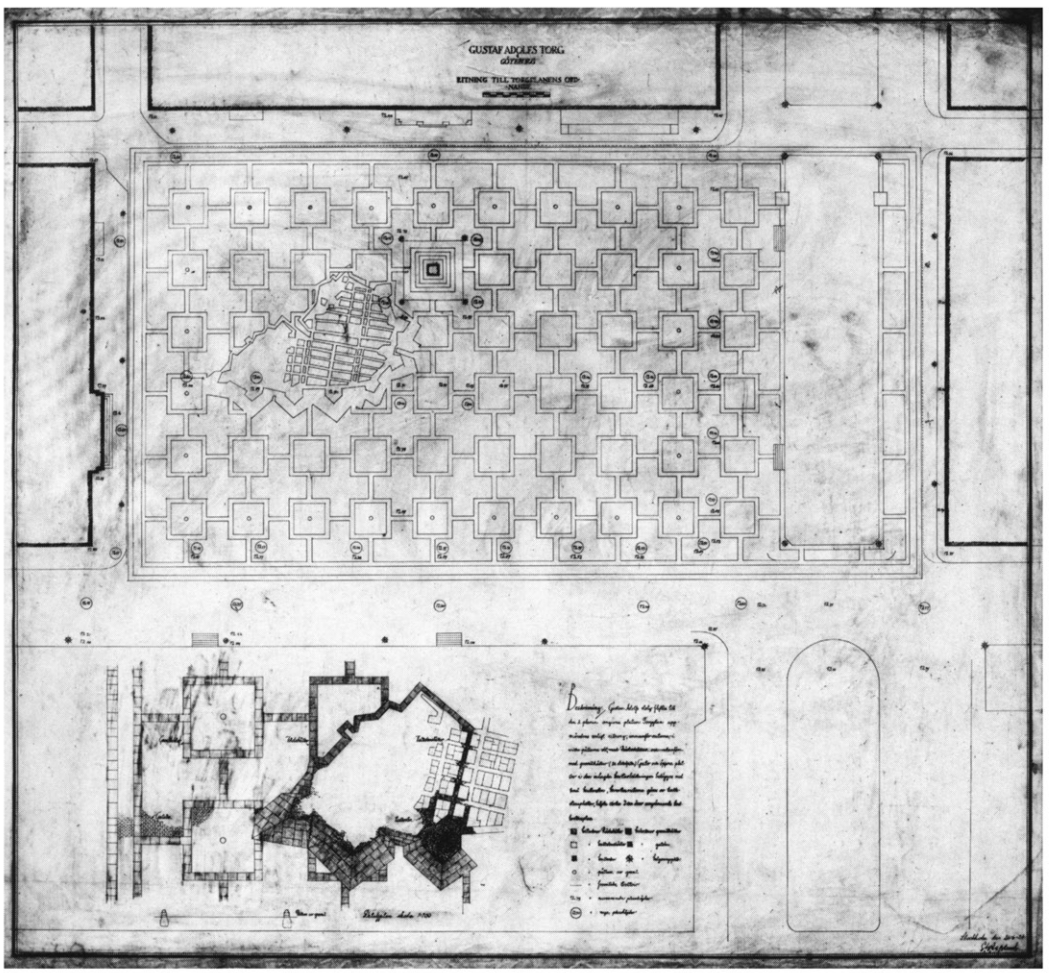

65. Proposal for paving Gustaf Adolf Square, 1924, plan and detail.

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The Royal Chancellery Competition Project

If the projects for Göta Square and Gustaf Adolf Square seem to us today, for all their inventiveness and charm, finally unconvincing, Asplund's second-prize competition project for the Royal Chancellery in Stockholm of 1921, designed with Ture Ryberg,[59] is much more compelling. Unfortunately it was never built.

Diagonally behind Tessin's dominating and magnificent Royal Palace, the building complex was bound by water on one side and Stockholm's medieval old town on the other, with the nineteenth-century Bonde Palace flanking it at the water's edge (fig. 66).

Asplund's and Ryberg's project was radically different from most of the other prizewinning entries, which drew inspiration from Kampmann's and Rafn's Police Headquarters in Copenhagen and introduced a circular interior courtyard. Instead they crafted a scheme suggested by the historical context of the old town. Though its organization differs significantly from that of the urban fabric, it successfully captures the striated quality of the surroundings with narrow passages and courtyards that run through the block. Seen from the water, the complex appears to be four different buildings with small alleys between them, an effect that is consonant with the scale and arrangement of the buildings lining the waterfront of the old town (fig. 67).

But, unlike the haphazard urbanism of the old town, the Chancellery has a clear, cloven stem-and-branch organization like that of a tree (figs. 68, 69). This organization applies as well to the arrangement of the open spaces within the complex. Carving out part of the block adjacent to Myntgatan, the street which runs through the middle of the complex, the architects created a cul-de-sac square which became an extension of the square in front of the House of Nobles (adjacent to

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the Bonde Palace) as well as the central space from which their project emanated. Though the building complex is divided in two, lining the sides of the newly created Chancellery Square, the part embedded in the old town block is only partly developed, suggesting a potential for future expansion (at the expense of the old buildings remaining on the block). However, the asymmetrical inflection it creates at the end of the square is critical in producing the spiraling rhythm of the whole project. The building wings branching off the main stem reinforce this implied spiral by turning back on themselves upon reaching the water.

The main monumental entry, facing toward the palace, has something of a vestigial quality (fig. 67). For the building is really designed to draw the public in via the Chancellery Square, through the secondary courtyards to the entries at their monumental end facades (figs. 70, 71). Within each of the three secondary courts the two-sided entry stairs straddle a ramp which leads down under the building to the water beckoning beyond.

This wide downward ramp fills the center of the courtyard, forcing the visitor to the complex to hug one periphery or the other to get to the narrow entry stairs, as well as to choose which route to take. As with the doors at the Villa Snellman, the juxtaposition of ramp and stairs is disquieting. But here Asplund seems to have subversively weighted the situation in favor of the passage to the water, encouraging and tempting the arriving visitor to make a pleasant escape from whatever business or bureaucratic encounter awaits him in the building. The complex play of courts, passages, and entries successfully breaks down this huge government building into smaller components, paradoxically creating a sense both of intimacy and enigma.[60] In contrast

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to the revolutionary urbanism of the Modern Movement, which made a radical break with the past, the Royal Chancellery project has been seen as a design strategy favoring urban continuity,[61] adapting itself empirically to its context while creating an ideal configuration within its own confines.

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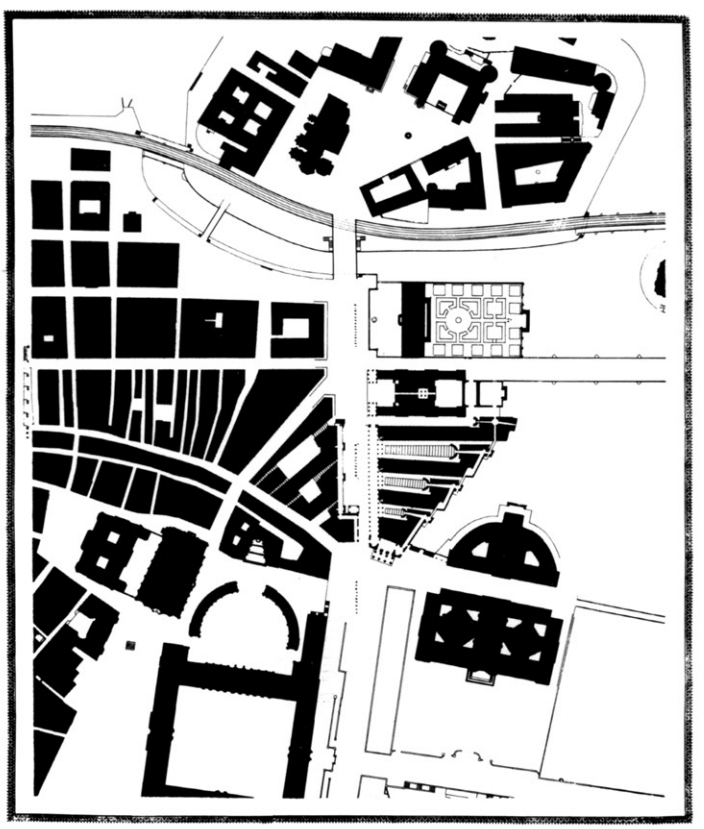

66. Competition entry, Royal Chancellery, Stockholm, 1922, site plan, with Ture Ryberg.

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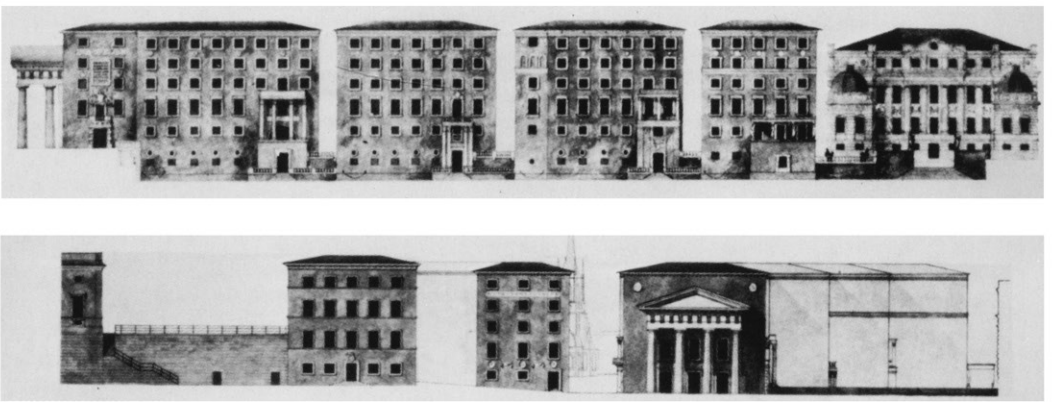

67. Competition entry, Royal Chancellery, top to bottom: facade toward water; facade toward Royal Palace; west elevation toward Bonde Palace; south elevation of the main building facing Chancellery Square; with Ture Ryberg.

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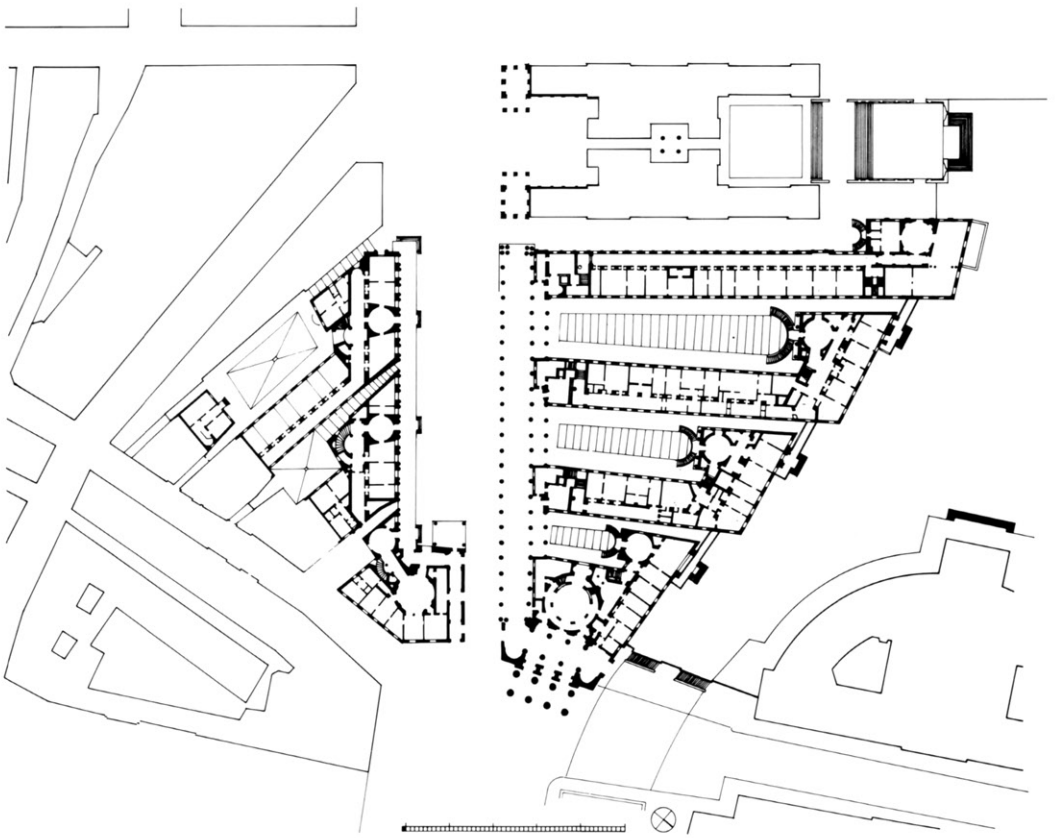

68. Competition entry, Royal Chancellery, ground floor plan, with Ture Ryberg.

69. Competition entry, Royal Chancellery, first floor plan, with Ture Ryberg.

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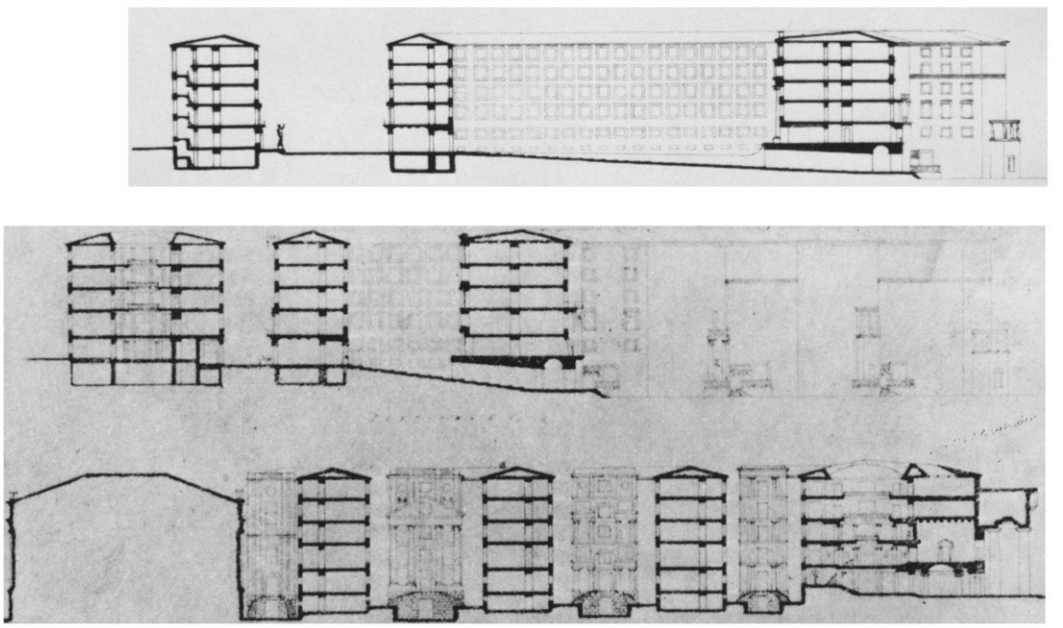

70. Competition entry, Royal Chancellery, sections, with Ture Ryberg.

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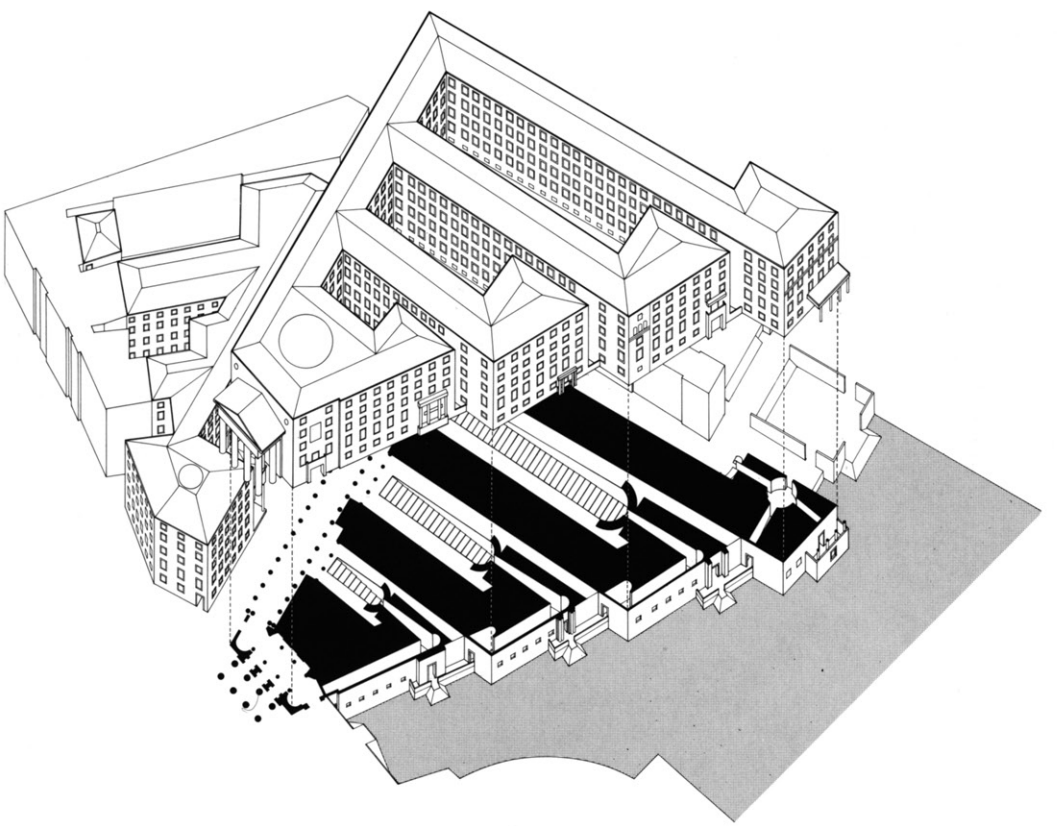
71. Royal Chancellery, axonometric of competition scheme with main building raised to show public circulation through courtyards and building.



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Classicism

3

Asplund's work parallels the development of architecture in Scandinavia, which moved from the medieval National Romanticism of the first decade of the century to an increasingly strict classicism in the 1920s. Like National Romanticism before it, the new classicism, as it is often called, represented a serious attempt at innovation, at breaking away from historical eclecticism. The movement strove to find new expression for classical principles and to develop an architecture representing new cultural ideals. Thus it was a progressive rather than a reactionary enterprise. Removed from the upheavals of World War I on the Continent, this Scandinavia-wide movement was evolutionary rather than revolutionary and had its roots in bourgeois culture.

Classicism made its first reappearance in Scandinavia in Denmark, a country with a long and illustrious classical tradition which had for a number of years been under the sway of Martin Nyrop's innovative brick medievalism. The story of its re-emergence makes it seem almost a fluke, except for the fact that the strong revival of interest in classicism in Germany made it inevitable.[62] In 1910 the owner of the Carlsberg Breweries, offended by the squat proportions of the tower of C. F. Hansen's Freukircke, offered to pay for putting a spire on it. Carl Petersen, an established but relatively unknown architect, protested by organizing an exhibition of Hansen's drawings. The show elicited a wide and sympathetic response and put an end to the spire. It led a group of painters in 1911 to request Petersen to design the Faaborg Museum, generally considered the first classical building of what was to become a Scandinavia-wide movement.[63] But Petersen's building, with its pitched roof, retains a certain modest vernacular air. Similarly, Aage Rafn and Kay Fisker, who were to

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emerge as two of Denmark's leading architects in the 1920s, were designing, on the island of Bornholm in 1915–1916, railroad stations with distinct associations with Scott and the English cottage tradition. It was Hack Kampmann's and Aage Rafn's Copenhagen Police Headquarters of 1918–1924 that marked the full emergence and the high point of classicism in Denmark. Their achievement is paralleled by the vast reductivist projects of Ivar Bentsen for housing (with Carl Petersen) of 1919 and for an opera and concert hall complex for Copenhagen of 1920, neither of which was built. The reductivist and rationalist tendencies of these two projects were to find their finest embodiment in the Oregaard School of 1922–1924, by Edvard Thomsen.[64]

Asplund and Lewerentz were in the vanguard of the classical movement in Sweden. Having won the competition for the Woodland Cemetery, they shared an office for some time[65] and enjoyed a close friendship. Much like Alvar Aalto and Erik Bryggman in Turku, Lewerentz and Asplund spurred each other on,[66] and the fortuitous coupling of talents affected architectural developments in both their countries. The later cross-pollenation of ideas between Asplund and Aalto was to have an even greater importance.

But Asplund's work clearly stands apart from that of his talented Swedish and Danish colleagues in its emotional resonance. His meldings of vernacular and classical motifs in his projects up to 1922, brilliant formal exercises in themselves, had equally symbolic and emotional motivations. As his work progressed, he developed other motifs with which to achieve his ends. The vernacular-classical duality was gradually replaced by dualities of a more cosmic, symbolic character with analogies to man and nature. Asplund, who had devel-

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oped a keen appreciation for the unexpected juxtapositions and naive formality of much vernacular architecture, was able to implement similar effects in his own work. Thus in its inventive combinations of elements and scale his work provided an undertone of wit as well. In this respect it stands apart from brilliant but often dry formal solutions, such as the Police Headquarters in Copenhagen, of his Scandinavian colleagues.

The Skandia Cinema

The Skandia Cinema of 1922–1923 in the center of Stockholm involved the design of a theater within an existing building (fig. 72). Since the cinema as a building type was relatively undefined at this early date, Asplund took as a point of departure the client's brief, which pointed out "the public's desire for a festive, unreal pomp as a setting for the film world of fantasy."[67]

Asplund conceived the main theater hall as a festival in a courtyard under a starry night sky[68] (fig. 73). In painting the barrel-vaulted ceiling dark blue and hanging electric globes in a free pattern to simulate the stars, he was updating a familiar theme.[69] Set into the imaginary courtyard are three separate canopied balconies. Combined with the side balconies are a series of intimate round loges, each coupled with one of the small entries to the general balcony seats. Covered in a dark red velvet, the walls of the side balconies are decorated with oversized Pompeian motifs, while the back balcony sports a nude Venus by Hilding Linnqvist (figs. 74, 75).

Asplund sensed that the theater curtain played an important psychological role and wrote of his solution. "The curtain in a cinema has a clearly different character from that of a theater, which exists to hide the work

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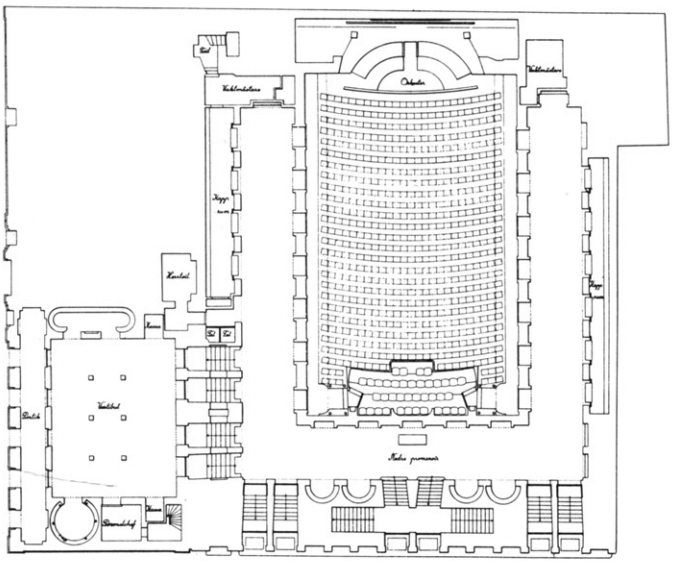

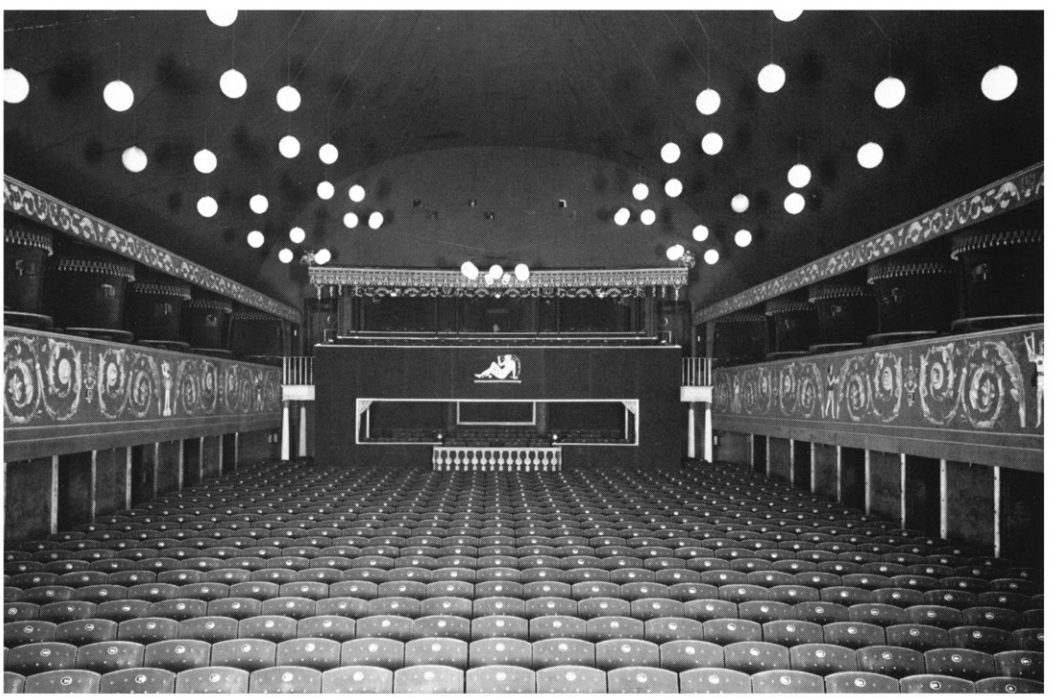

72. Skandia Cinema, Stockholm, 1922–1923, ground floor plan.

73. Skandia Cinema, main hall, view toward rear balcony.

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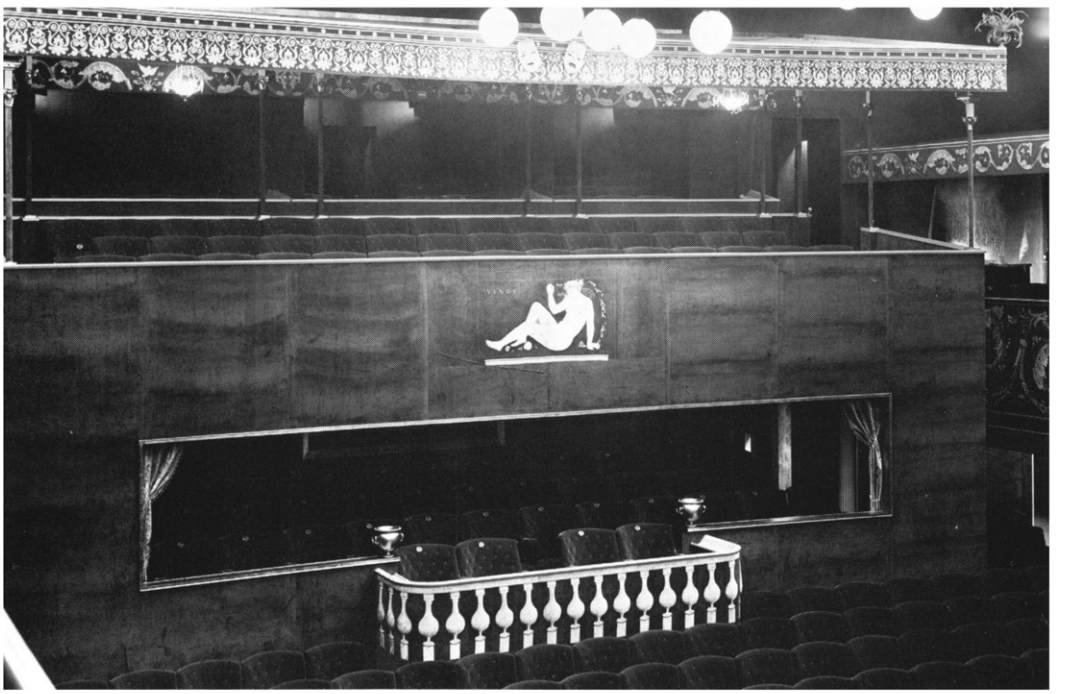
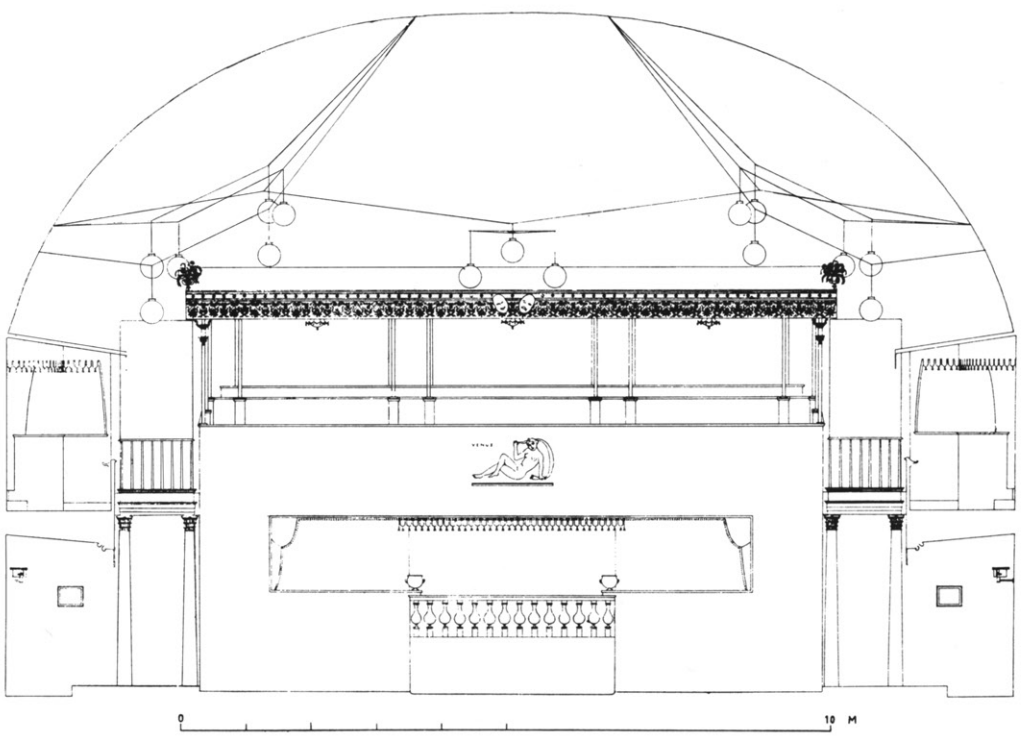
74. Skandia Cinema, back balcony, detail.

75. Skandia Cinema, drawing, section of hall toward back balcony.





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going on on the stage. This is not required in a movie theater, and therefore a movie curtain shouldn't be totally closed, but rather leave an open view, giving the audience the impression that there is something that exists behind it."[70] He created a double curtain, the one behind, partly visible when the front ones were drawn, of a crumpled shiny silver material lit from above (fig. 76), and, as he explained, "giving a view toward the light, which, when the curtain opens, becomes transformed into the picture on the screen." He concluded, "Flanking this lighted opening, and during the movie, the picture on the screen, stand Adam and Eve on guard."[71]

A subtle but strong sexuality pervades this composition, reinforced by other details in the hall, such as the Venus figure, and the phallus-like loudspeaker (in frontal view a full moon) emerging from the ceiling with the gilded sculpture of a fleshy Luna (by Gunnar Torhamns) on its tip[72] (fig. 77).

Adam and Eve (here sculpted in gilded wood by Ivar Johnsson) were to be a recurring symbol in Asplund's work. Their presence and meaning, richly associational, both serious and jesting, varies from project to project. Here they are standing guard at the gates of paradise, represented by the curtain. After briefly partaking of the heavenly delights, the audience, like the Adam and Eve of the myth, are expelled to the cold and unfriendly world outside. But on another level Adam and Eve represent the myth of the beginning, man in his precivilized natural state, and, in their nudity, our inherent sexuality, offering the repressed bourgeois audience eager for escape an alternative vision to the celluloid fantasies on the screen.

In the side promenades upstairs we are presented with a row of doors, each one projecting from the wall,

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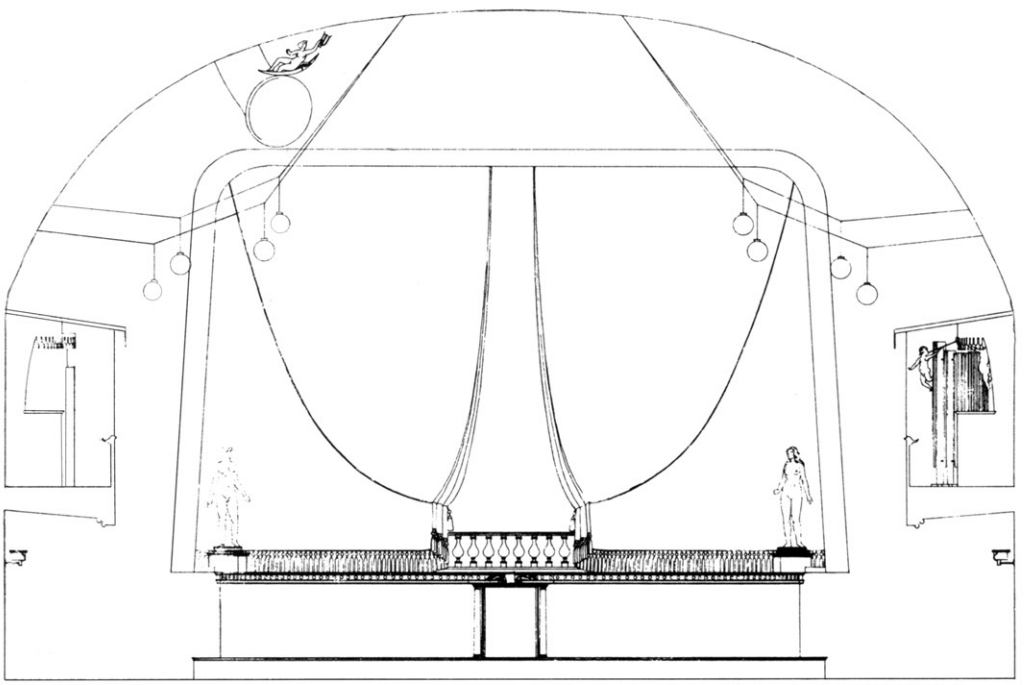

76. Skandia Cinema, main hall, view toward screen.

77. Skandia Cinema, drawing, section of hall toward cinema curtains.

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78. Skandia Cinema, second floor, side promenades.

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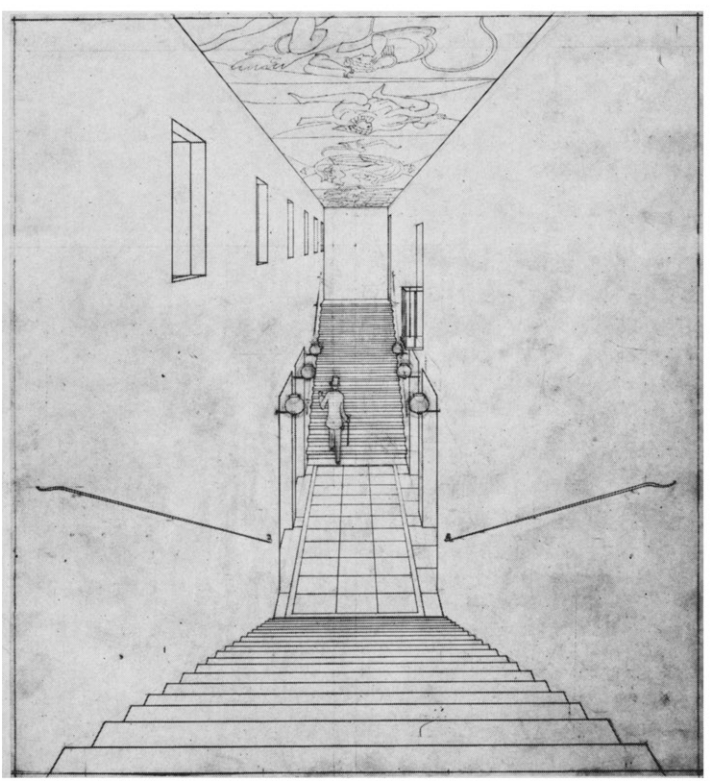
79. Skandia Cinema, second floor, back promenade.



80. Skandia Cinema, perspective drawing, staircases to second floor.

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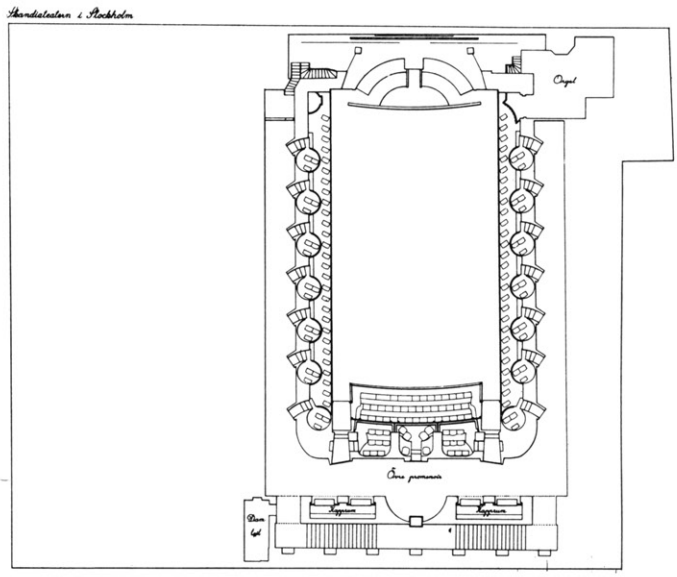

81. Skandia Cinema, second floor plan.

82. Skandia Cinema, ticket booth.

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83. Skandia Cinema, rotunda off lobby.

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inflected toward us and beckoning (fig. 78). They are subtly sinister while suggesting unknown and exotic pleasures. These doors and the three more monumental doors facing the rear promenade (fig. 79) all play an elaborate game of scale, in which many possible openings are suggested. Painted black and red with gilt decorations, the doors appear insubstantial, signaling the public that this is a mise-en-scène, a world of fantasy.

Studied in plan, the walls of the theater salon upstairs display an almost baroque exuberance (fig. 81). The doors extending into the side promenades can be read as part of the modulation of the outside wall, but they also appear as appendages of the round balcony niches, which have pushed through and deformed the salon walls.

The main motifs of the cinema are already hinted at in the lobby, with its glass ticket booth set askew (fig. 82), and in the small adjacent rotunda dedicated to famous Swedish film stars (fig. 83). The dark void beyond the hole in the rotunda ceiling is both an architectural pun on the stars on the walls and an intimation of the cinema hall itself.

Alvar Aalto, whose first meeting with Asplund took place in the just-finished cinema hall, beautifully summed up its quality: "I had the impression that this was an architecture where ordinary systems hadn't served as parameters. Here the point of departure was man, with all the innumerable nuances of his emotional life, and nature."[73]

Family Vaults for Prince Oscar Bernadotte and Secretary of State Hjalmar Rettig

Asplund's work at the Woodland Cemetery led to a number of commissions for family mausoleums, of which the Bernadotte family vault of 1921 at the North Burial Grounds in Stockholm is perhaps the finest (fig. 84). Set on a grass- and tree-covered hill, the tomb

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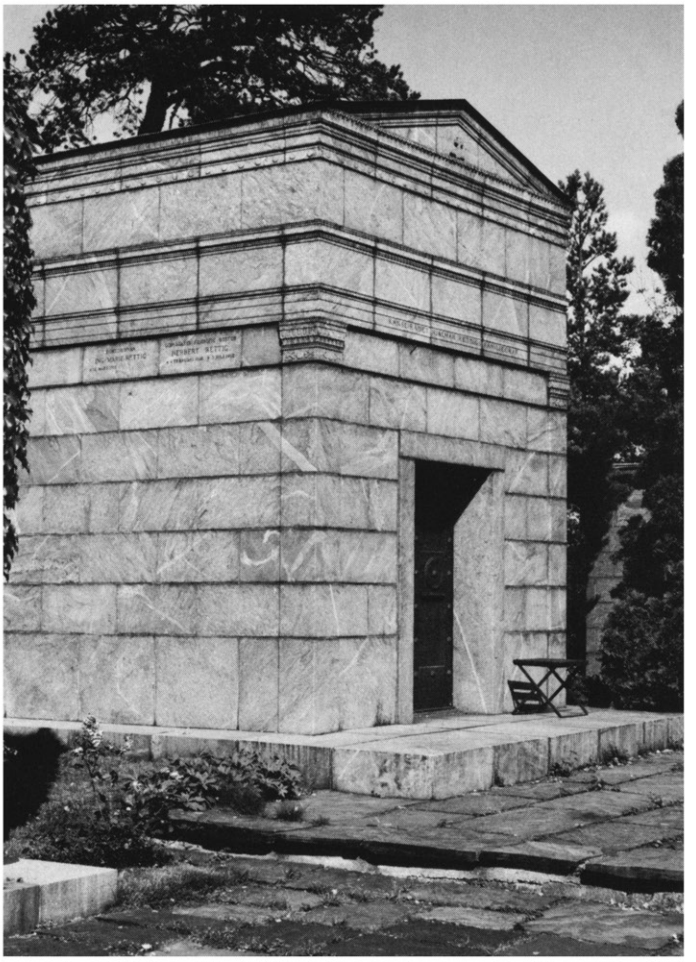

84. Family tomb of Prince Oscar Bernadotte, North Burial Grounds, Stockholm, 1921.

85. Family tomb for Secretary of State Hjalmar Rettig, North Burial Grounds, Stockholm, 1926–1928.

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stands at the end of a forecourt gently terraced into the sloping site. The tomb itself is a simple classical loggia framed in slabs of grey granite. It is open only to the forecourt; its back is buried in the sloping hill and its roof is covered in sod. Two Tuscan columns of the same granite frame the entrance to the vault. The stucco walls of the loggia are covered with marble tablets commemorating members of the family.

In its sparse elementary classicism, its use of materials, and its careful integration into the site, the Bernadotte family vault modestly prefigures Asplund's great Woodland Crematorium of 1935–1940.

The family vault for Secretary of State Hjalmar Rettig of 1926–1928 is one of Asplund's last classical designs (fig. 85). A tour de force of refined surface modulation carved in stone, the tomb was to set the tone for the final phase of classicism in Scandinavia, informing both Sven Markelius's winning competition entry for the Halsingborg Concert Hall and a number of Alvar Aalto's church competition entries of the late 1920s.

Project for the Swedish Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts

Asplund's entry in the limited competition held in 1924 for the Swedish pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exhibition was entitled "*Vers la Seine.*" The proposal, which was not selected,[74] was designed for a constricted site in the middle of an allée of trees adjacent to the banks of the river, flanked by other national pavilions (fig. 86).

As the motto indicates, the theme of the project was the approach to the Seine. It is expressed almost to the point of redundancy by the monumental Corinthian-column-lined processional of the piano nobile (figs. 87, 88), ending at a balcony overlooking the river and through a narrow tunnel passing under the building as if the alternate route through a forest of Tuscan columns did not exist (figs. 89, 90). By juxtaposing the

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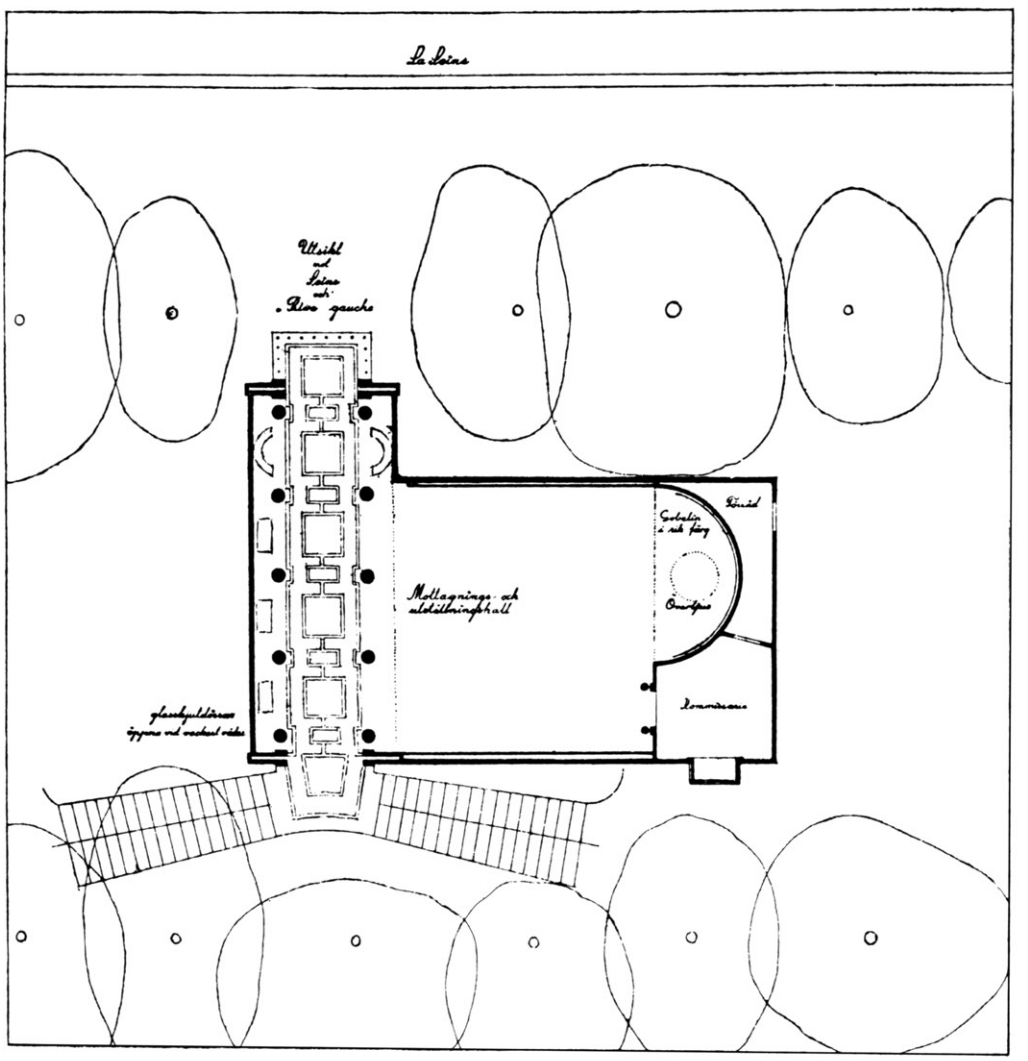
86. Competition entry, 1924, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition of 1925, plan.



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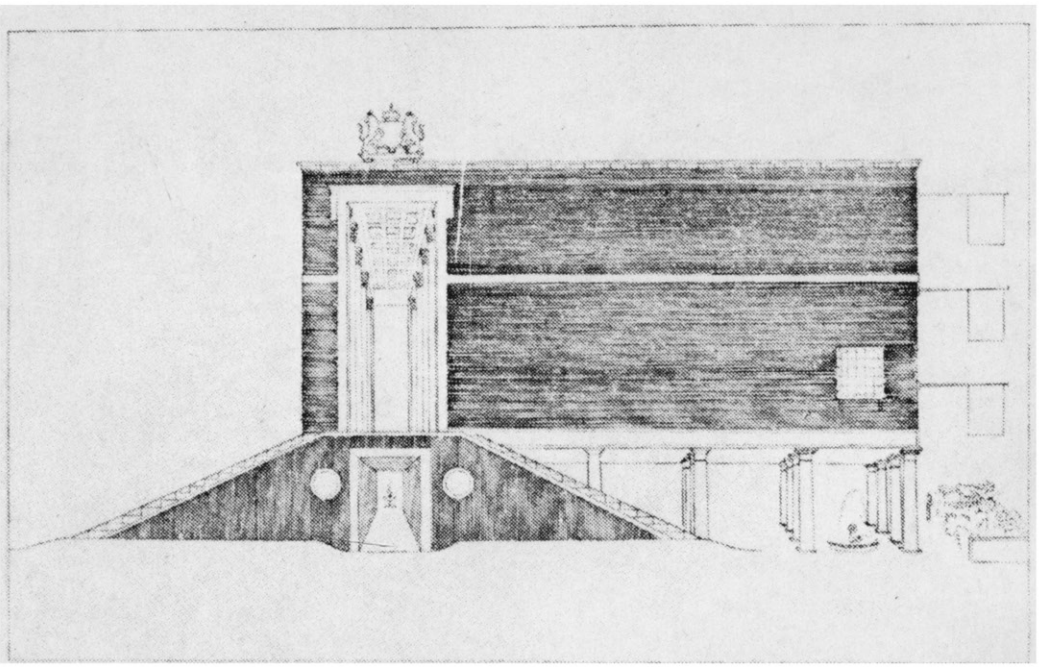

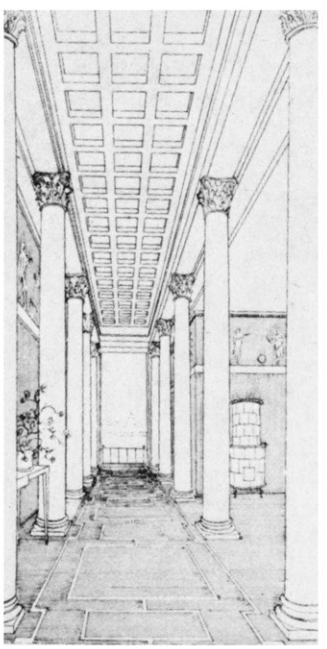

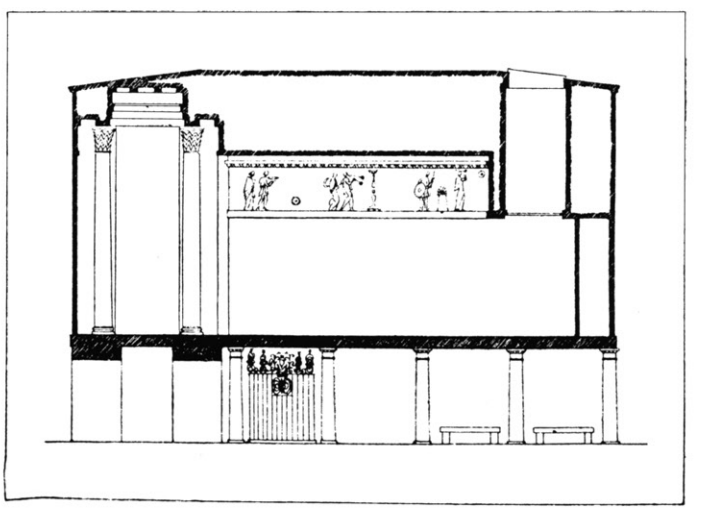

87. Competition entry, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition, drawing, exterior perspective.

88. Competition entry, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition, drawing, perspective from entry, main floor.

89. Competition entry, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition, section.

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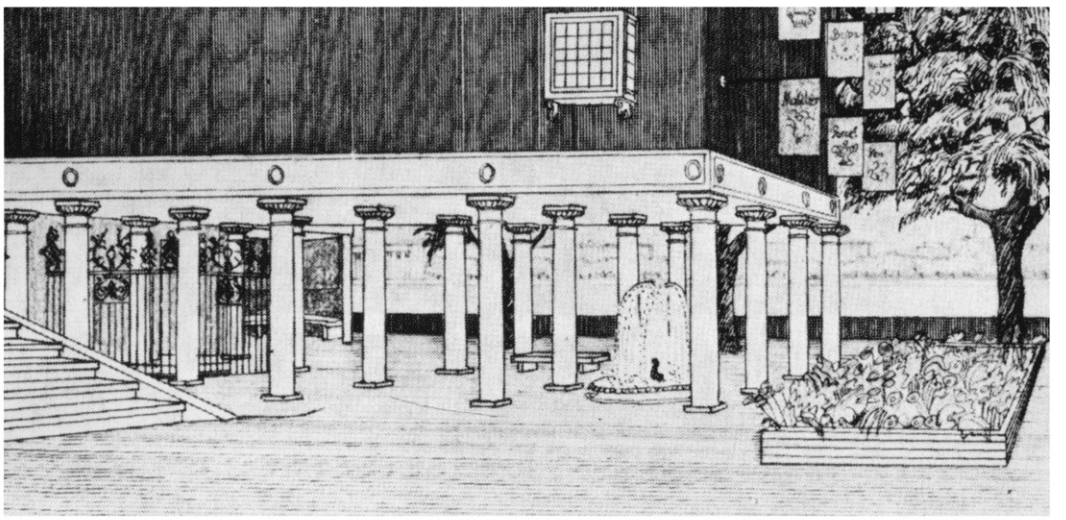

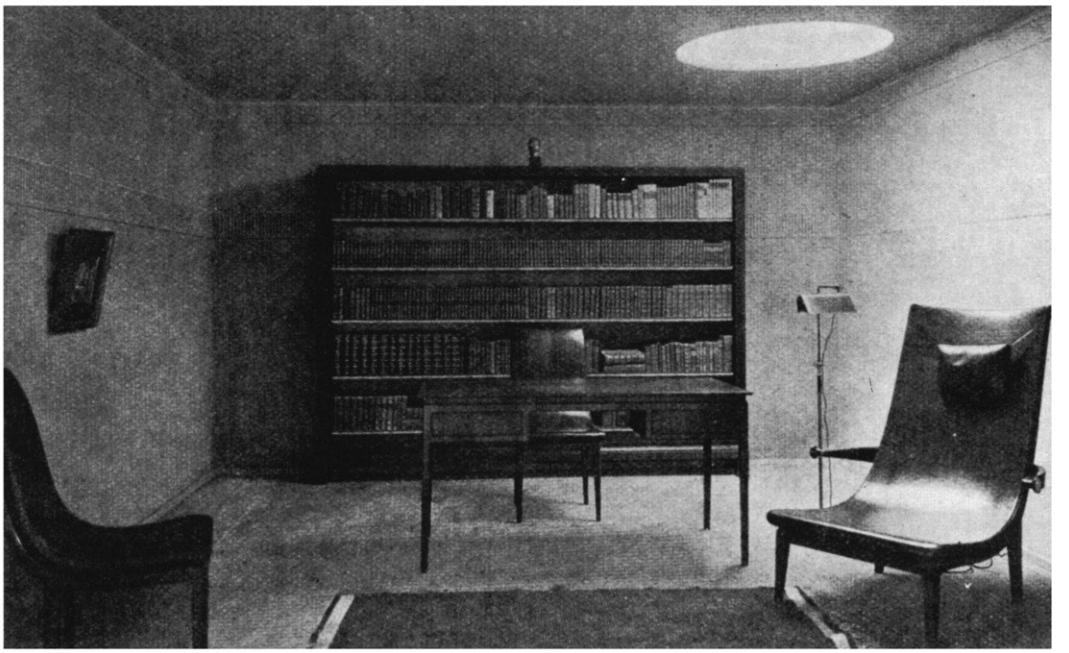

90. Competition entry, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition, drawing, perspective of open ground floor.

91. Interior, Swedish Pavilion for Paris Exhibition.

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passages through and under the building Asplund has once again, as with the doors of the Villa Snellman and the Royal Chancellery entry processionals, wrenched us out of our architectural preconceptions. The contrast of monumental entry with small, modest pavilion reinforces the effect. In the two earlier projects the result is a disquieting and enigmatic quality, but in the Paris pavilion project the effect is essentially witty, displaying Asplund's lighter, more frivolous side.

According to colleagues, Asplund did not become aware of Le Corbusier's writings and work until 1926, but this seems unlikely, as Le Corbusier had been well publicized. One suspects that in the pavilion project Asplund was taking the opportunity of commenting on that architect's radical principles on the latter's home ground,[75] his chosen title being a barely veiled reference to Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture,* which had appeared the year before.

Though his pavilion was never built, Asplund was asked to design an interior as part of the Swedish section of the exhibition (fig. 91). Though the dramatically lit space retains a traditional classical aura, one senses here that Asplund was moving in a clearly modernist direction.

The Stockholm Public Library

Asplund was originally retained by the City of Stockholm to help determine the requirements for a public library and to prepare a competition program. In conjunction with this work he traveled to the United States, which at the time had the most developed system of public libraries in the world, in contrast with Sweden, where the public library was an untried concept. As the programming progressed, the building committee decided that Asplund was the most suitable architect for the job.

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The site, a large, L-shaped parcel along Sveavägen and Odengatan in central Stockholm, was dominated by the tall, steep Observatory hill in the middle of the block (fig. 92). Having decided on the organization and form of the building at an early stage (a compact mass which would not be overpowered by the hill), Asplund went through a number of different organizational schemes in the years 1922–1924. Initially he had conceived the corner of the two streets as a public square at grade, off which the main entrance to the library would be located. But in a reversal the final scheme placed the building on a platform set on the corner, housing shops. Access to the building is via a wide ramp from Sveavägen and a stair from Odengatan.

The final siting of the library on the corner left two large, open parcels of land, one along Sveavägen, which was to become a park, the other behind the library along Odengatan, which was proposed as the site of a market building. While the library was under construction Asplund entered and won a competition for the arrangement of the park along Sveavägen. In addition he was asked to design the market hall along Odengatan, unfortunately never built.

The winning design for the park along Sveavägen called for a large, shallow rectilinear pond (fig. 93). Intersecting one side of the pond and jutting out into it was a smaller square, defined by walls and evenly planted with trees, through the middle of which a stream flowed, widening to become a small, square pond in the middle of the square itself before flowing into the large pond. The stream originates at the top of the hill, comes down a straight chute under a small pedestrian footbridge, and then breaks into a cascade with stairs on either side before arriving at the tree-shaded

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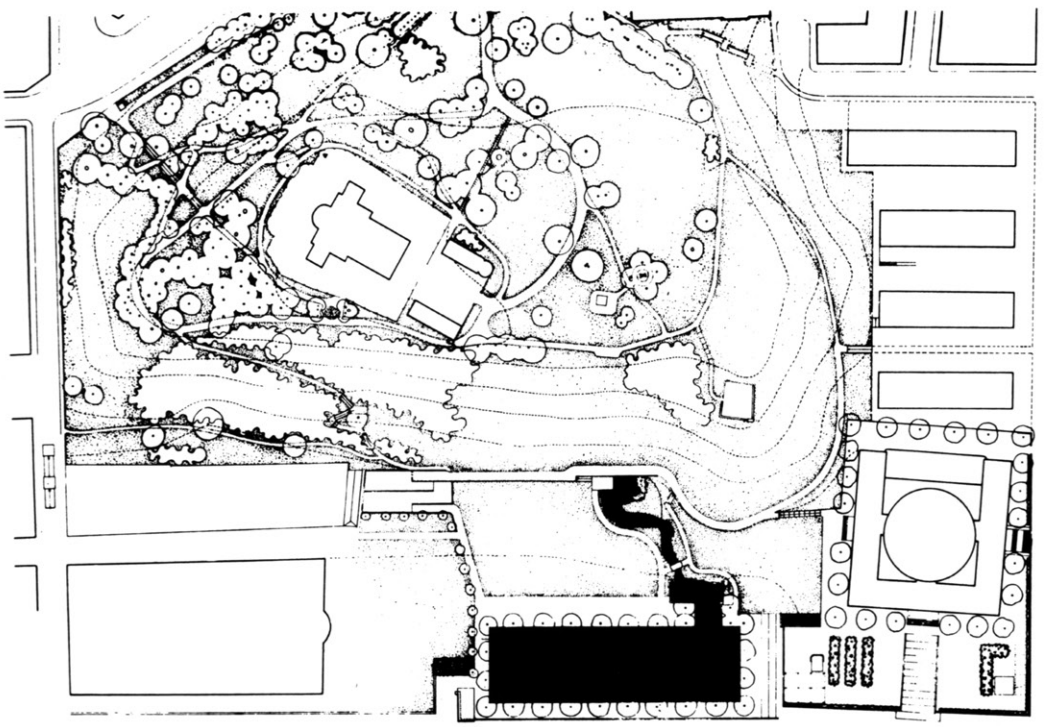

92. Public Library, Stockholm, 1920–1928, final site plan.

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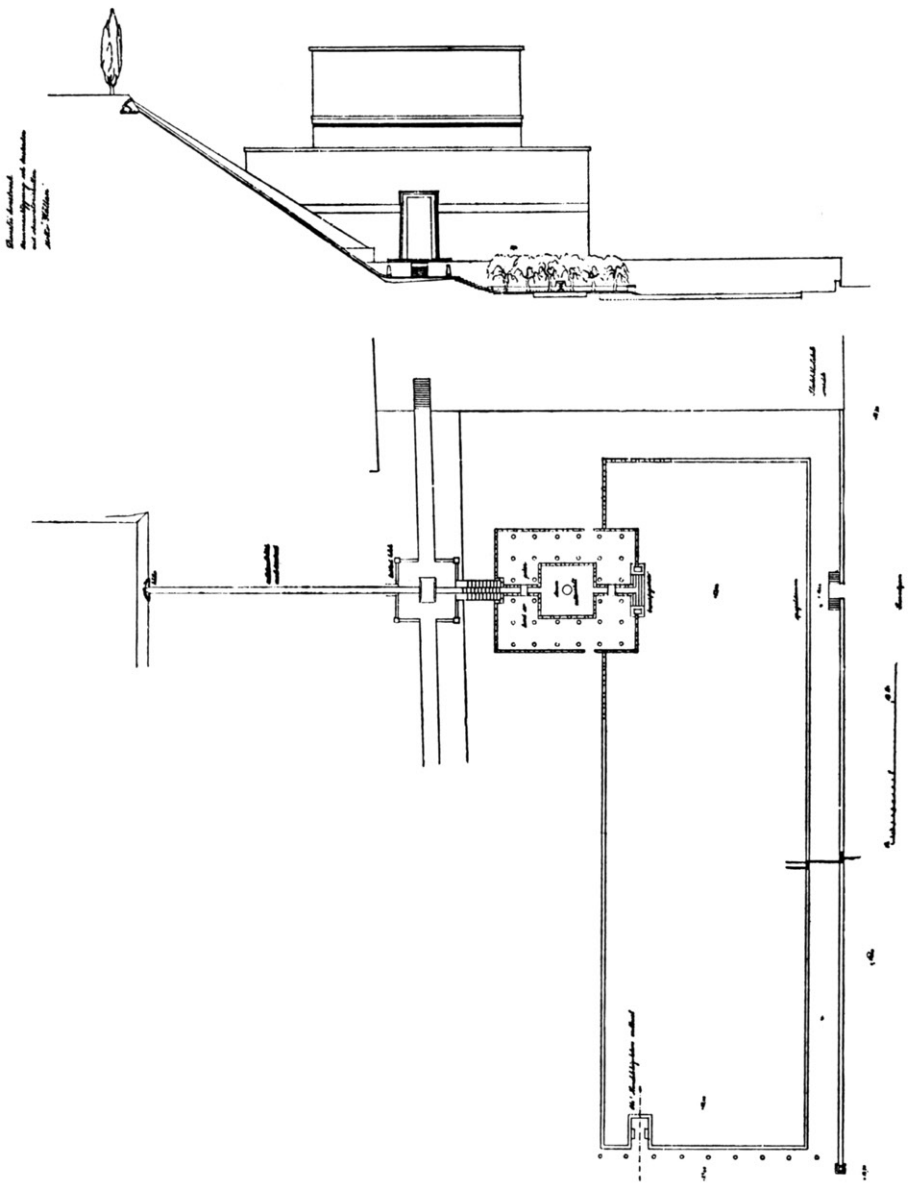
93. Public Library Park, Stockholm, 1920–1928, section and plan.



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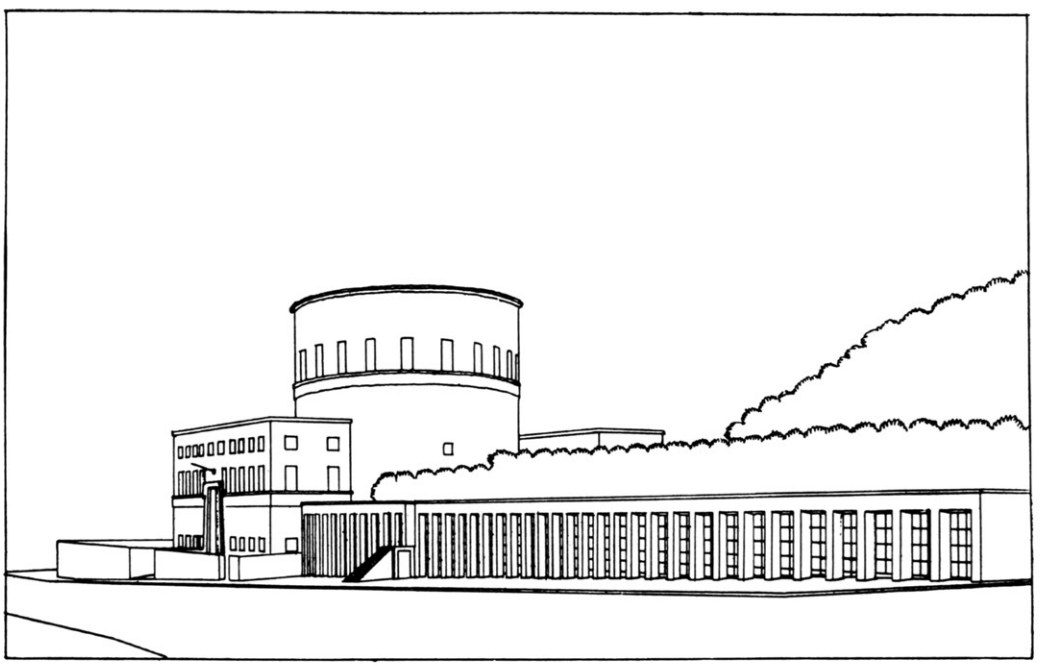

94. Public Library, Stockholm, drawing, perspective of back of library with proposed Odenhallen (market), 1926.

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square. This severely rectilinear but rich landscape plan remained the basis for the park, but both the stream and the small square were unfortunately modified into a more naturalistic solution.

The Odenhallen, as the proposed market behind the library was named, was a long, rectilinear, single-story, single-loaded corridor building set back from the street to allow temporary open air stands in front of it (fig. 94). It was oriented only toward the street, being partly built into the earth because of level changes. It thus acted as a wall between the street and the park, with only one freestanding stair set at a perpendicular connecting the two. The articulation of the stair into its basic geometric components anticipated similar strategies in Le Corbusier's later work. In its relation to the massive bulk of the library, the market hall is subordinate, essentially continuing the role of base and wall played by the platform the library stands on. The relationship of the long, low hall to the high, square library recalls Schinkel's plan for the Neue Packhof in Berlin.

The Stockholm Public Library is Asplund's great masterpiece in the classical style (fig. 95). The parti of the building, which was established early on in the design process, is a stark, neoclassical composition (figs. 96, 97). A perimeter zone of reading rooms form a square, open courtyard almost entirely filled by the round lending hall. Access is at the four tangent points only. The back side of the square was originally open (fig. 98), but Asplund later added a wing (always planned) which completed it (fig. 92). Though the plan remained essentially the same the designs went through two distinct schemes, involving different articulation of the facades and of section of the central round hall (fig. 99).

The original scheme, dating from 1921, consisted of a domed central lending hall. The lower half of the

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95. Public Library,
Stockholm, exterior.

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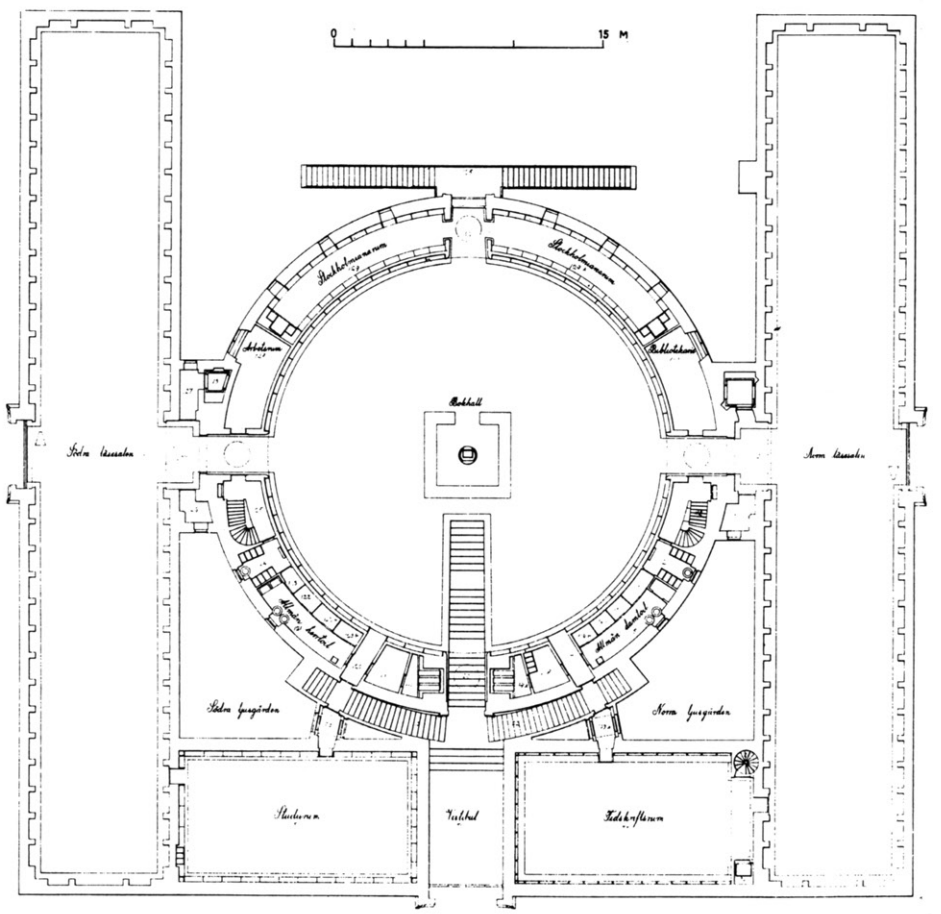

96. Public Library, Stockholm, final plan (square completed at later date).

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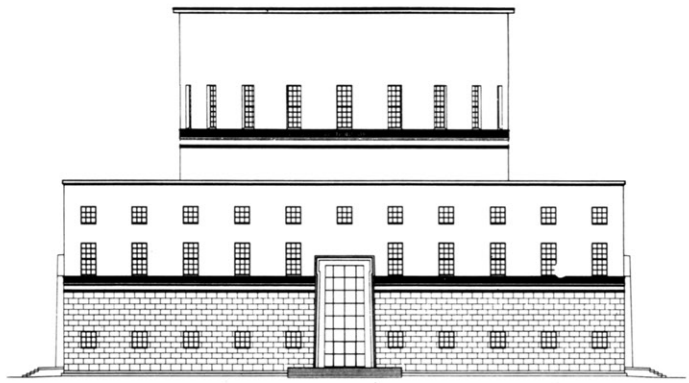

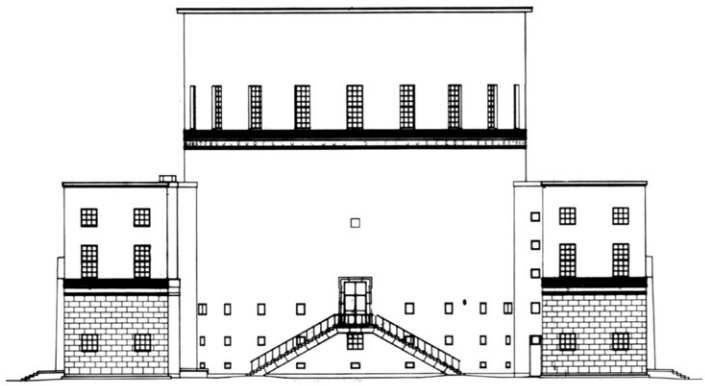

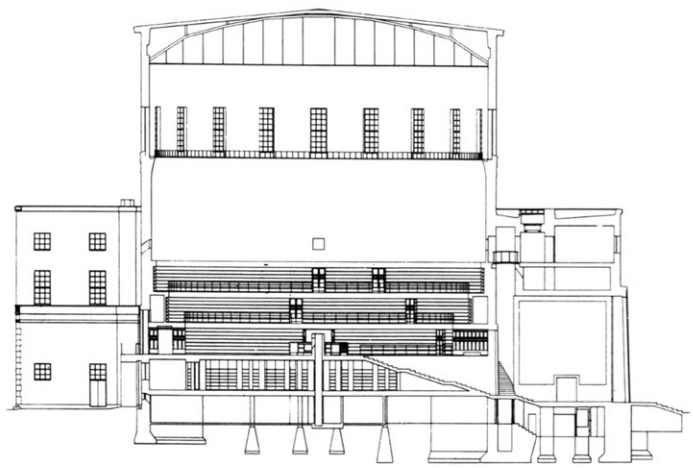

97. Public Library, Stockholm, front facade.

98. Public Library, Stockholm, back facade.

99. Public Library, Stockholm, section, final design.

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round hall was lined with three tiers of bookshelves stepped back to accommodate access passages (fig. 100). By making the lower access passage wider than the top one, Asplund was trying to approximate a spherical space. The dome had skylights laid out in a pattern not dissimilar to the coffers of the Pantheon.

In the front facade drawing of this scheme (fig. 101) there appears, silhouetted above the entrance, a curious symbol, a bald head in profile with a projecting goatee for which there is no known explanation. I would suggest that in fact it represents the key to Asplund's symbolic vision of the design, that he conceived of the building as a metaphor for the mind and that the almost spherical rotunda symbolizes the interior of the cranium. The visual analogy between the head and the building in section is revealing in this regard. In a perspective drawing of the entry, we find a floor mosaic of an emaciated body with the Greek inscription *Gnoti Seafton,* or "Know Thyself," a detail that would be consistent with this interpretation (fig. 102). The back facade is quite unorthodox for the period and is also symbolically consistent[76] (fig. 103). There is no compelling functional reason for its arrangement, an evenly spaced grid of square windows to light what were to be mainly the stacks. Rather, the grid with its pigeonhole windows may be interpreted as a model for information storage and retrieval, and so, in a sense, for a mechanical concept of the mind.

If this interpretation of Asplund's intention is correct, it recalls the work of the great neoclassicists of a hundred years earlier, with which Asplund's has close formal affinities. But where Boullée's spherical interior of the Newton memorial was a mechanical model of the universe, Asplund's spherical lending hall represented

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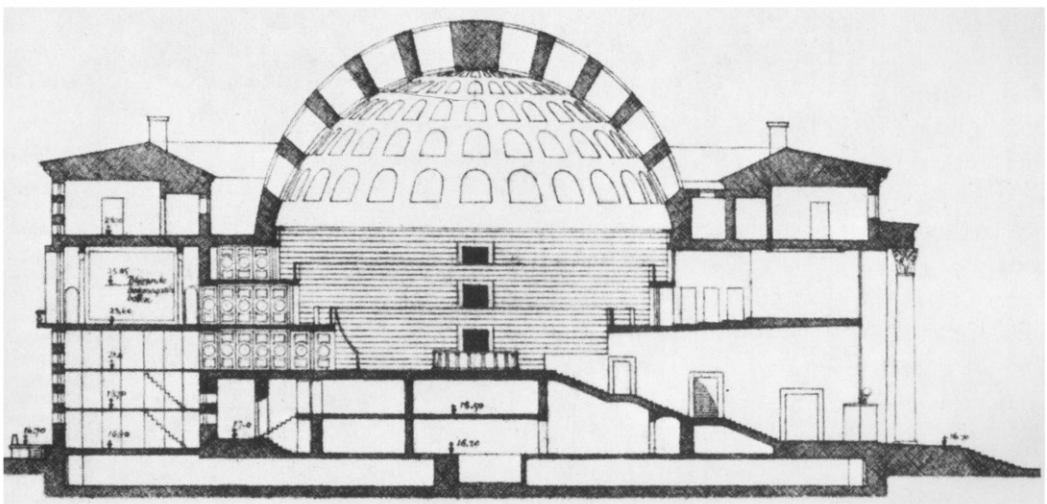

100. Public Library, Stockholm, section, first scheme, 1921.

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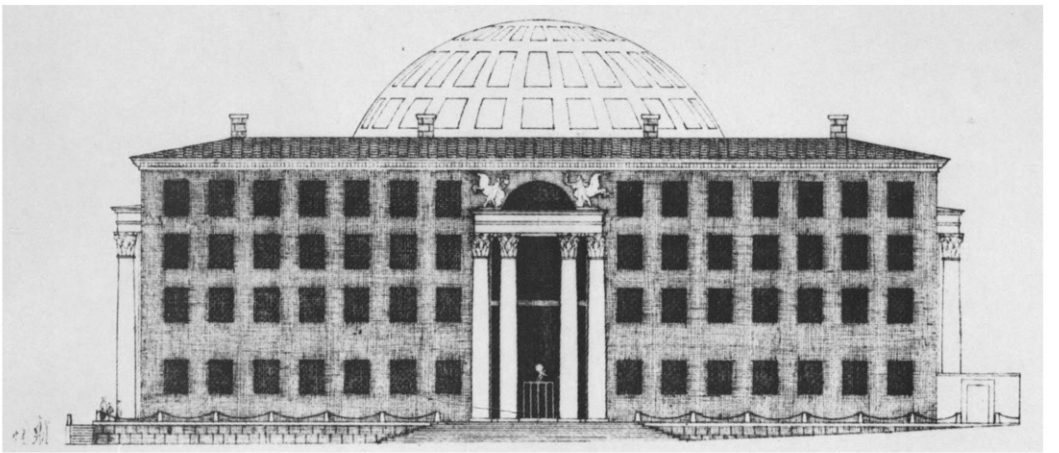
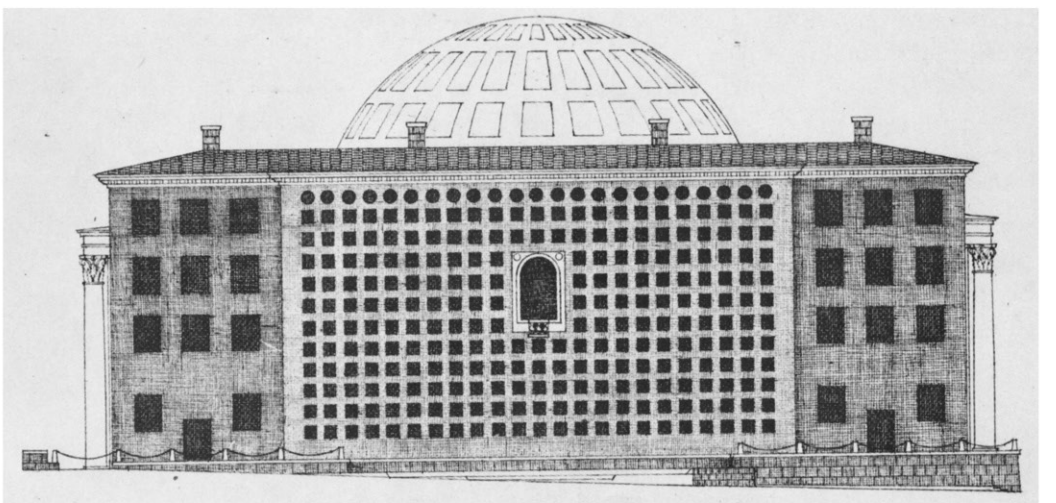


101. Public Library, Stockholm, front facade, first scheme.

102. Public Library, Stockholm, drawing, perspective of entry processional, first scheme.

103. Public Library, Stockholm, back facade, first scheme.



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the interior of the mind—a measure of the distance Western culture had traversed in the intervening time.[77]

For structural and formal reasons, the dome was changed to a tall cylinder. Not only would the skylit dome have been difficult and expensive to build, it would hardly have been perceptible from the exterior. But although Asplund abandoned a symbolic form to achieve a stronger formal solution, he did not abandon the symbolic dimension; he merely gave it a more abstract articulation. For in the concentrated impact of the primary geometric forms, in the coupling of circle and square,[78] the second and final version of the library clearly also invites symbolic interpretation. One may thus argue that the library was a culmination of those Continental currents of thought of the era which saw in "the fundamental geometric forms . . . the elemental union of primitive instincts and developed reason."[79] If so Asplund's original conception of the library can be said to have remained intact.

The building's entry processional may best be described as Egyptian (fig. 104). Passing through a high corridor with walls of polished black stucco (fig. 105), the public reaches the central lending hall one floor above via a straight, narrow stair which emerges in front of the main desk in the center of the hall (figs. 106, 107). The hall itself, as in the first scheme, is lined, in a manner recalling Boullée, with three tiers of books. Above the beautifully detailed wooden bookcases[80] and in contrast to them, rise the sheer, rough stucco walls of the cylinder, bathed in the light of high clerestory windows (fig. 108). A huge, bowl-like chandelier, concave upward, of white opalescent glass, hangs in the center of the hall. Capturing the light from above, it takes on an almost magically intense glow and becomes the focal

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104. Public Library, Stockholm, main entry, exterior.

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105. Public Library, Stockholm, main entry, interior.

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106. Public Library, Stockholm, stairs to lending hall with side stairs.

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point as one ascends from below into the lending hall.

The side stairs (fig. 109; ostensibly for the staff but seldom used) and the use of light in the entry appear also to take on a symbolic dimension. In contrast to the main stair, which ascends into the well-lit cylindrical hall with its glowing chandelier, the two curving side stairs, climbing the outer surfaces of the cylinder and dimly lit by rose-colored lights which hardly reflect off the ochre walls, ascend into a curving chasm of darkness. The contrast of light and dark and the insistent manner in which the mysterious side stairs press in (fig. 106) are highly enigmatic; though we may interpret the juxtaposition as the known contrasted to the unknown.

As he contrasts light and dark here, Asplund, playing with curtain materials, explores light as a positive and a negative phenomenon in the narrow, curving study rooms (fig. 110) surrounding the lending hall and in the director's room on the third floor (fig. 111). The director's room, a small neoclassical masterpiece, clearly shows the influence of Biedermeier.

On the ground floor in one of the side wings is the children's library, adjacent to which Asplund designed a special room for story telling. If the library is a metaphor for the mind, encompassing the known and the unknown, reason and instinct, then the story room (fig. 112) is where the mind's fantasy component, strongest in childhood, is contained. Asplund commissioned the painter Nils Dardel to paint an enveloping semicircular mural of a dream fantasy in the reading niche, wherein appear not only John Blund with his umbrella (a well-known character who brings sleep and happy dreams to Scandinavian children) but also a host of characters from various children's adventure stories.[81]

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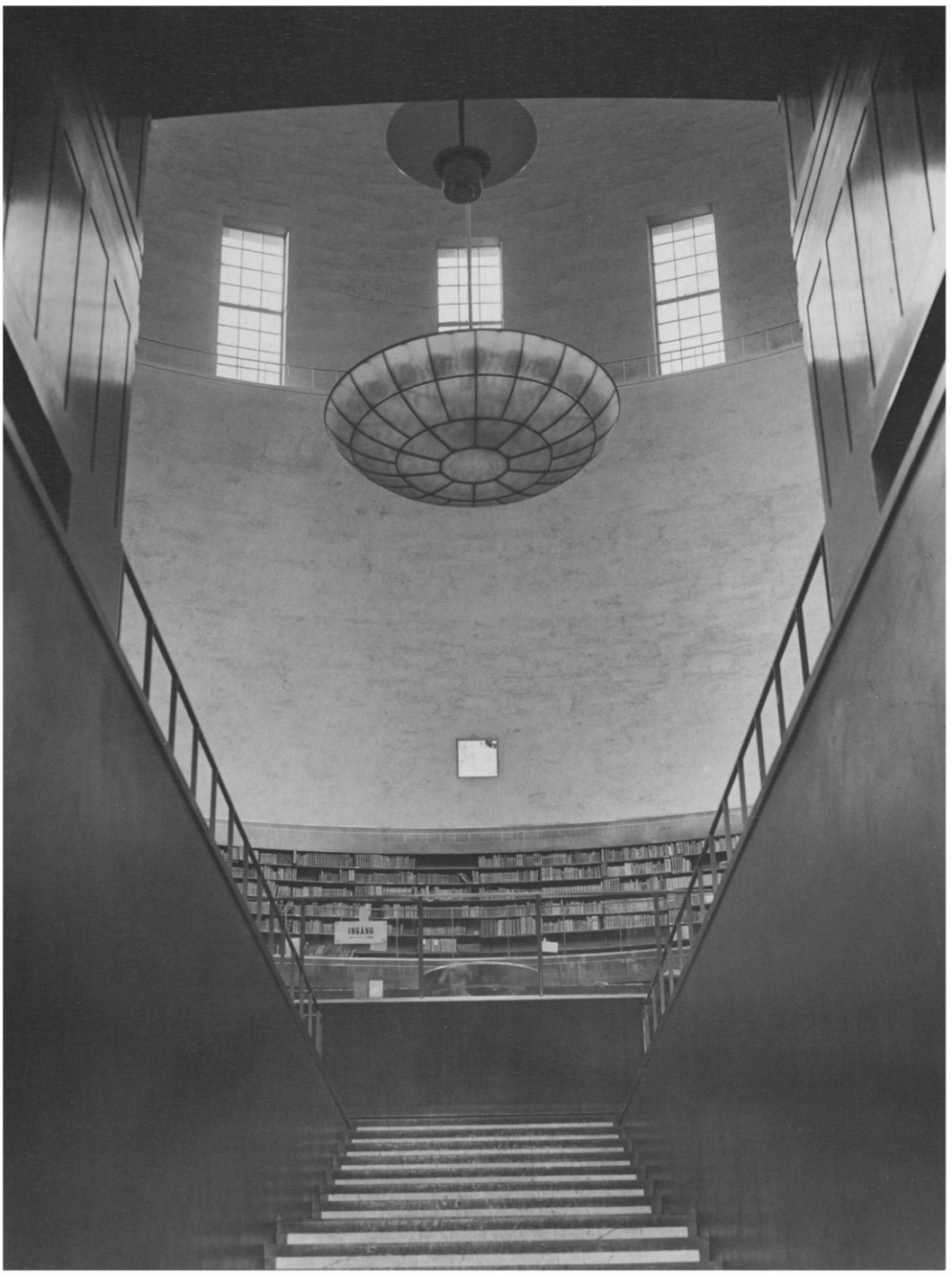
107. Public Library, Stockholm, lending hall from stairs.



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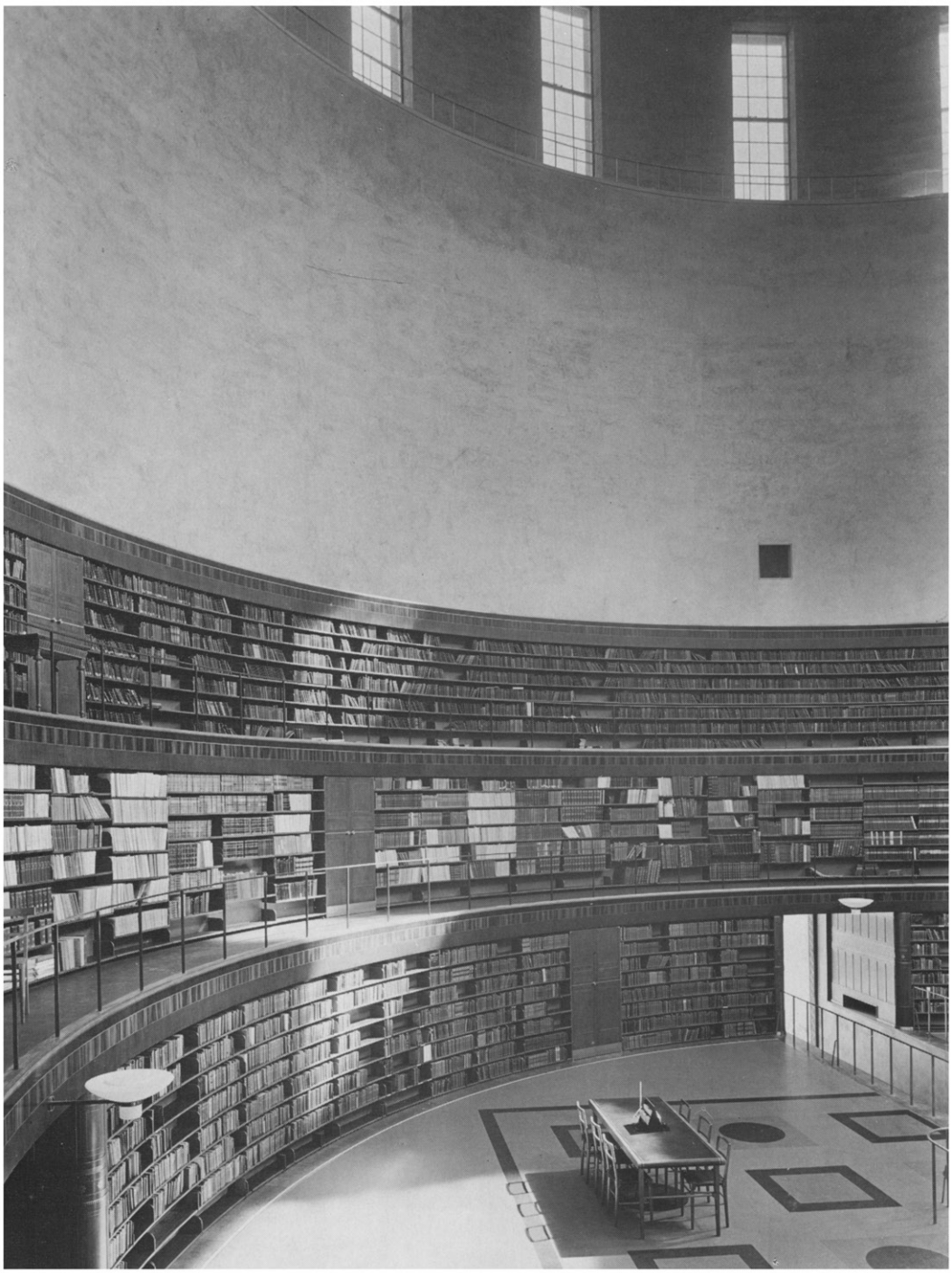
108. Public Library,
Stockholm, lending hall.



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109. Public Library, Stockholm, side stair.

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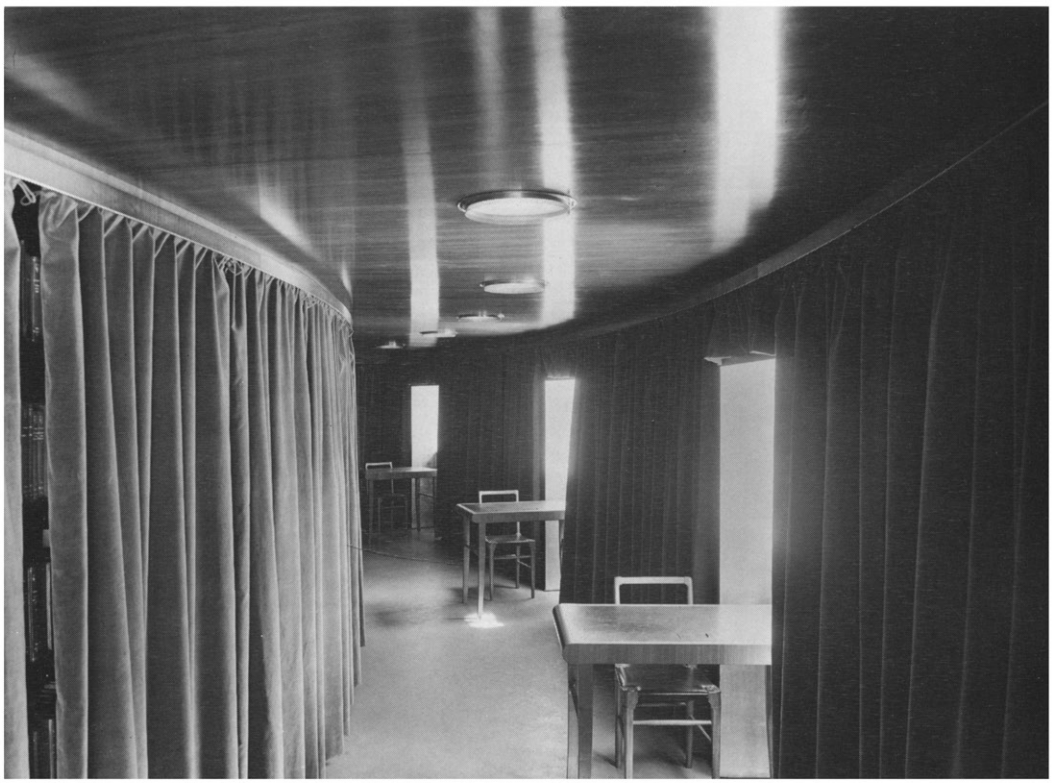

110. Public Library,
Stockholm, study room.

111. Public Library,
Stockholm, director's room.

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112. Public Library, Stockholm, children's story room.

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113. Public Library, Stockholm, Adam and Eve door handles.

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A final small detail gives a further twist to the symbolism of the building. The door handles of the main entrance to the library are, on the outside and inside respectively, the sculpted nude figures in bronze of Adam and Eve each holding an apple (fig. 113). Though their poses (in contrast to Masaccio's painting) hardly bring to mind the expulsion from Paradise they nonetheless may be seen as a cautionary symbol. As at the Skandia Cinema they are a reminder of our primitive and innocent beginnings. And their sensual nude bodies, which the public must clasp in order to enter and exit, are an insistent reminder of the flesh to those delving into the world of the mind.

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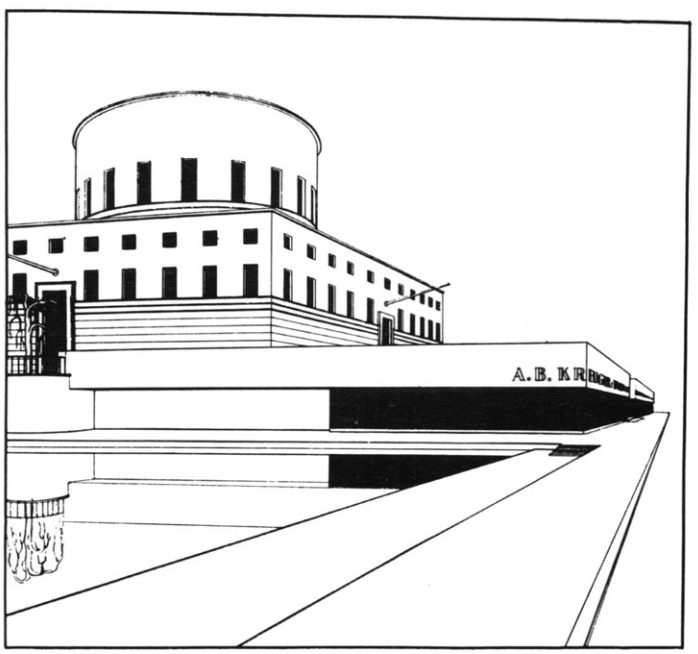

114. Public Library, Stockholm, drawing, perspective, exterior view of International Style base, 1928.

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Functionalism

4

Upon its completion in 1928 the Stockholm Public Library was confronted by a new professional climate. Developments on the Continent were making their breakthrough via the polemical writings of Uno Åhren, who had become acquainted with the work of Le Corbusier in 1925 at the Paris Exhibition.[82] Asplund himself was in the process of converting, which accounts for the International Style base of the library along the street (designed but not built at the Library's completion) (fig. 114). The perspective drawing of the modern base which appeared on the cover of the June 1928 issue of *Byggmästaren,* which dealt with the building indicated that something serious was afoot. The coverage the library received in the issue illuminates the context of change.

The lead article, "Reflections While in the Public Library," was written by Uno Åhren,[83] who had worked with Asplund on the Skandia Cinema. While acknowledging Asplund's talent and key importance to Swedish architecture of the last ten years, it was highly critical. To Åhren the library, and Asplund's whole working method, represented form and beauty as ends in themselves. "New classicism is dead," he concluded, and continued, "this building stands on the border, not between two minor stylistic tendencies in Swedish architecture, as some suggest, but between two phases of fundamental difference in mentality."[84] In this Åhren was correct, but, as Alvar Aalto was to observe approvingly in reviewing the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 for a Finnish paper, it was a new mentality that was to be imposed by the Swedish intellectuals on the average Swede.[85] Åhren's article was followed only by a concise functional description of the building by Asplund.

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Though the transformation of Swedish society had begun with the introduction of universal suffrage in 1911, the haute bourgeoisie had continued to exercise a cultural hegemony, especially in architecture, for the first three decades of the century. Asplund's library represented both its peak and its swan song. His Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 was to become the most striking symbol in Scandinavia of the advent of a new era. Two short years apart in terms of their completion date the two projects became the prime architectural symbols of the "fundamental difference in mentality" of which Åhren spoke. Seldom in history has one architect had the opportunity to build two projects that between them so clearly defined a major change in sensibilities.

One suspects that Asplund's conversion came about not so much because of the radical polemics of Åhren as because Asplund, who was acutely sensitive to the spirit of the times, realized the formal and symbolic import of the new architecture.[86] The commission for the Stockholm Exhibition for which the new vocabulary was a natural choice, and urging in that direction from the persuasive Paulsson, the director of the Swedish Arts and Crafts Society who organized the exhibition, must also have played an important part.[87]

Nils Erik Wikberg, former professor of architectural history at the Technical High School in Helsinki, summed up Asplund's importance to Scandinavian architecture in the 1920s and the impact of his conversion to functionalism. "In the 1920s Asplund was the inspiring architectural personality in the Nordic countries. Only those who themselves were part of the era could possibly fully understand what he meant at the time for architecture in Scandinavia, how each new project by him was an event, and what a sensation his determined conversion to the so-called functionalism involved."[88]

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The Stockholm Exhibition

The Stockholm Exhibition was conceived as a polemical gesture by Gregor Paulsson, who was both a radical reformer and a forceful advocate of the new architecture. Its theme was "Housing, Transportation, Furnishing." Whereas most previous exhibitions of the Swedish Arts and Crafts Society had essentially focused on interiors and furnishings for the rich and had an arts and crafts approach, the focus of the 1930 exhibition was the rising middle class and what industry was capable of producing to meet its needs.

Paulsson, who had had the idea after seeing the Paris Exhibition of 1925, proposed it to the board of directors of the Swedish Arts and Crafts Society in June 1927. A year later another meeting finalized the budget and made the official selection of chief architect. Asplund, who had worked closely for many years with the society and who had been on the program committee of the exhibition from the beginning, was a natural choice. His talent and his fame made him Paulsson's greatest resource.

According to Paulsson, the designs developed through three stages.[89] All the schemes had the same overall concept of buildings enclosing the northern and eastern sides of the site, creating a large, triangular open space with Djurgården bay forming the third side (fig. 115). But Asplund's first proposal (now lost) was, according to Paulsson,[90] in the style of the Villa Snellman. A radical change occurred in August 1928. Asplund proposed that the whole exhibit be built of glued wood trusses (Swedish *torebodabalkar*), and that above everything should hover balloons and blimps. Though pleased at the new direction, Paulsson appeared to be a bit startled, finding it a little too playful and formalistic. The executive committee, essentially conservative, turned down the proposal and sent

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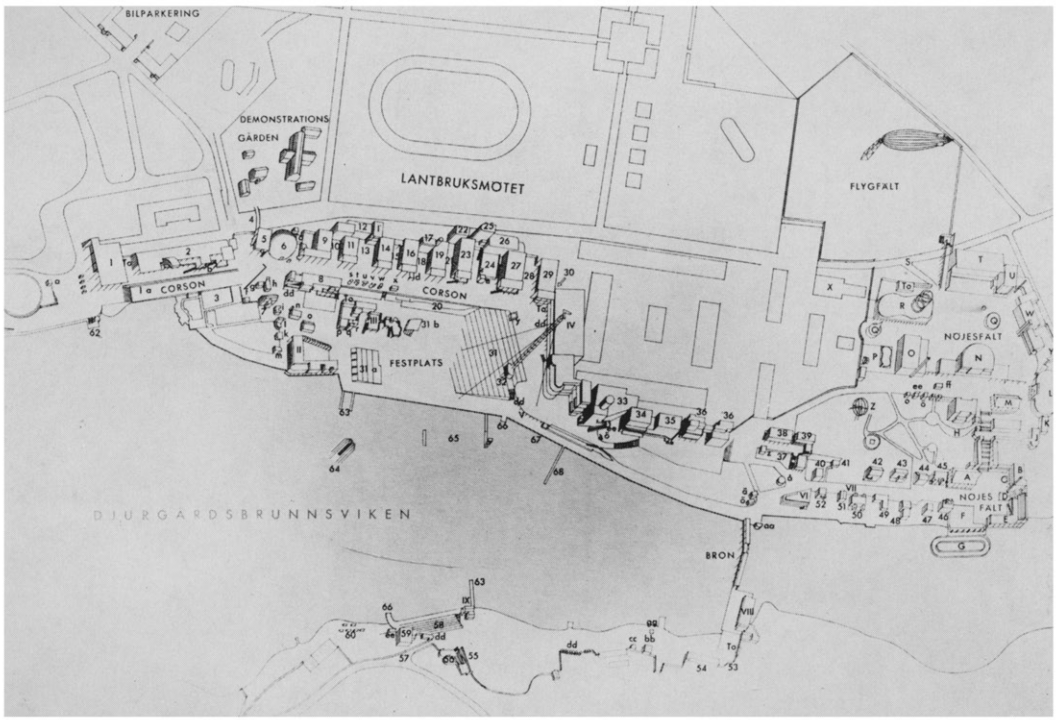

115. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930, axonometric site plan.

116. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930, handicrafts pavilion with typical cul-de-sac.

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Asplund and Paulsson on a trip to the Continent, perhaps, as Paulsson said, hoping they would come to their senses.[91] Instead they spent their time going to the Brno Exhibition, seeing the buildings at Weissenhof, and visiting Giedion, Hoffman and, in Le Corbusier's absence, Pierre Jeanneret. The final scheme, finished that winter, was in a full-fledged functionalist, International Style vocabulary.[92] Its approval was assured when Ivar Tengbom, a board member who was both highly respected and well connected, gave it his blessing.

The Stockholm Exhibition marked the emergence of functionalism in Scandinavia. But Asplund's brilliant grasp of the International Style has obscured the fact that his exhibition plan was an important departure from the radical urbanism of the Modern Movement. Instead of dispersing his buildings in the parklike setting, he used an essentially traditional urban scheme, with esplanades, cul-de-sacs, and buildings arranged to form streets (fig. 116). In the courtyards laid out perpendicular to the main concourse, the scheme has affinities with the earlier and traditional Royal Chancellery project. Asplund was seriously addressing a problem that Le Corbusier, Mies, and Gropius ignored because they did not see its solution as important, and that was the problem of how to create a unified and vital urbanism along traditional lines with the new style.[93]

On another level the Stockholm Exhibition represented a significant expansion of the International Style vocabulary. Asplund, who had always been a master of the use of subsidiary elements in architecture, put them all (flags, canopies, neon signs, landscaping) to highly effective use here (fig. 117). Commenting on this aspect of the exhibition, Aalto remarked, "For Asplund, the

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Finnish tourist who rides the watercycle for one crown on Djugården bay is a valuable object who gives the exhibition life."[94] Advertising and typography had of course figured in de Stijl and Russian constructivist projects and in Le Corbusier's little Nestlé pavilion, but the Stockholm Exhibition marked their first inclusion in a large-scale environment. Observers from the period attest to the important shift it represented in how the new architecture was perceived by the wider public.[95] Of a severe, puritanical, ideological architecture confined to housing, factories, and tuberculosis sanitoriums was made something not only human but fun and enjoyable as well.[96]

Thus perhaps an argument could be made that the Stockholm Exhibition defused the revolutionary fervor of the Modern Movement by transforming it into an architecture more in conformance with traditional culture.[97] The exhibition, although symbolically highly progressive, was no longer revolutionary, and can be said elegantly to prefigure the emergence of the Swedish welfare state in the 1930s.[98]

The exhibition consisted of a series of temporary structures designed to be used for one summer and then dismantled. The prevalent structural system used was the same glued *torebodabalkar,* 60 centimeters deep, that Paulsson mentions in connection with the second scheme. The trusses were supported by 5-by-7-inch wooden columns spaced at 4-meter intervals in the walls. Further vertical supports were provided at 1-meter intervals, and to these were nailed the 1-by-2-meter Eternit panels which constituted the exterior cladding of all the buildings and which, because of their dimensions, could be hung either vertically or horizontally.[99] The larger halls, such as the Transportation Pavilion

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and the Paradise Restaurant, had steel frames, as had the Entrance Pavilion, with its tall slender columns.

The finest building of the exhibition was the Entrance Pavilion (figs. 118, 119, 120), of which Asplund wrote, "It is perhaps not a building but rather a necessary, festive advertising arrangement, dressed during the day in colorful international flags and at night in rich illumination."[100] The small administrative building, the Kommissariat, was conceived as a separate entity tucked under the great entrance canopy. Diagonal steel tension members, used to stabilize the light structure, were freely expressed. The tall entrance pillars consisted of structural steel angles with opalescent glass surfaces behind which lights were placed. At night columns and roof were lit.

The Transportation Pavilion (figs. 121, 122) followed the Entrance Pavilion and housed examples of all modes of transport from busses to boats to airplanes. It was open to the main promenade (the Corso) but closed off at the back, where its roof curved down to the ground. Locked into the basic structure were subsidiary pavilions with dramatic roof shapes meant to emphasize the objects on exhibition.

These first two freestanding buildings were followed by a series of attached halls set perpendicular to the main promenade. These pavilions were connected at their far ends by other pavilions, creating a series of cul-de-sacs (figs. 123, 116). Typical of this arrangement, the steel and glass constructivist Lighting Pavilion (figs. 123, 124), set at the end of one of these cul-de-sacs, was really a three-story-high display window. Inside, it had two balconies that stepped up toward the glass front and a roof that curved in three scalloped sections to the ground.

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117. Stockholm Exhibition, Entrance Pavilion.

118. Stockholm Exhibition, Entrance Pavilion.

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119. Stockholm Exhibition, Entrance Pavilion.

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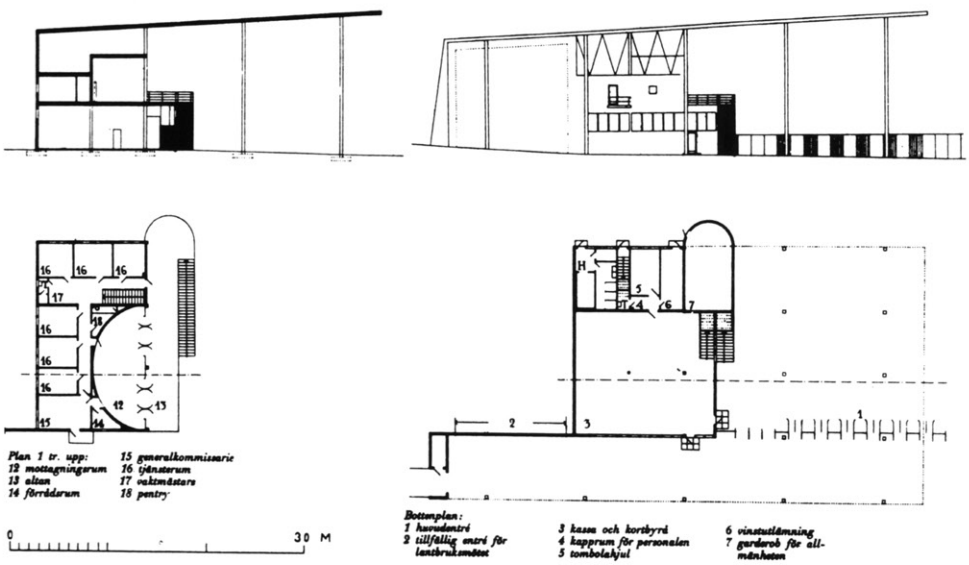

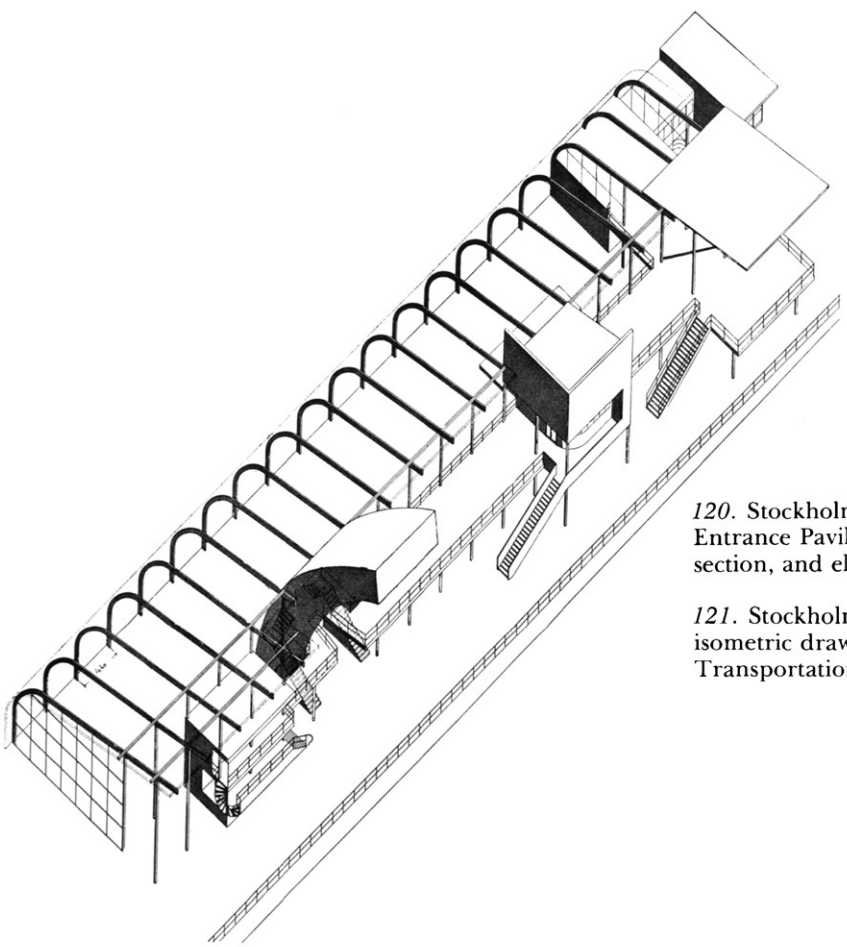

120. Stockholm Exhibition, Entrance Pavilion, plans, section, and elevation.

121. Stockholm Exhibition, isometric drawing, Transportation Pavilion.

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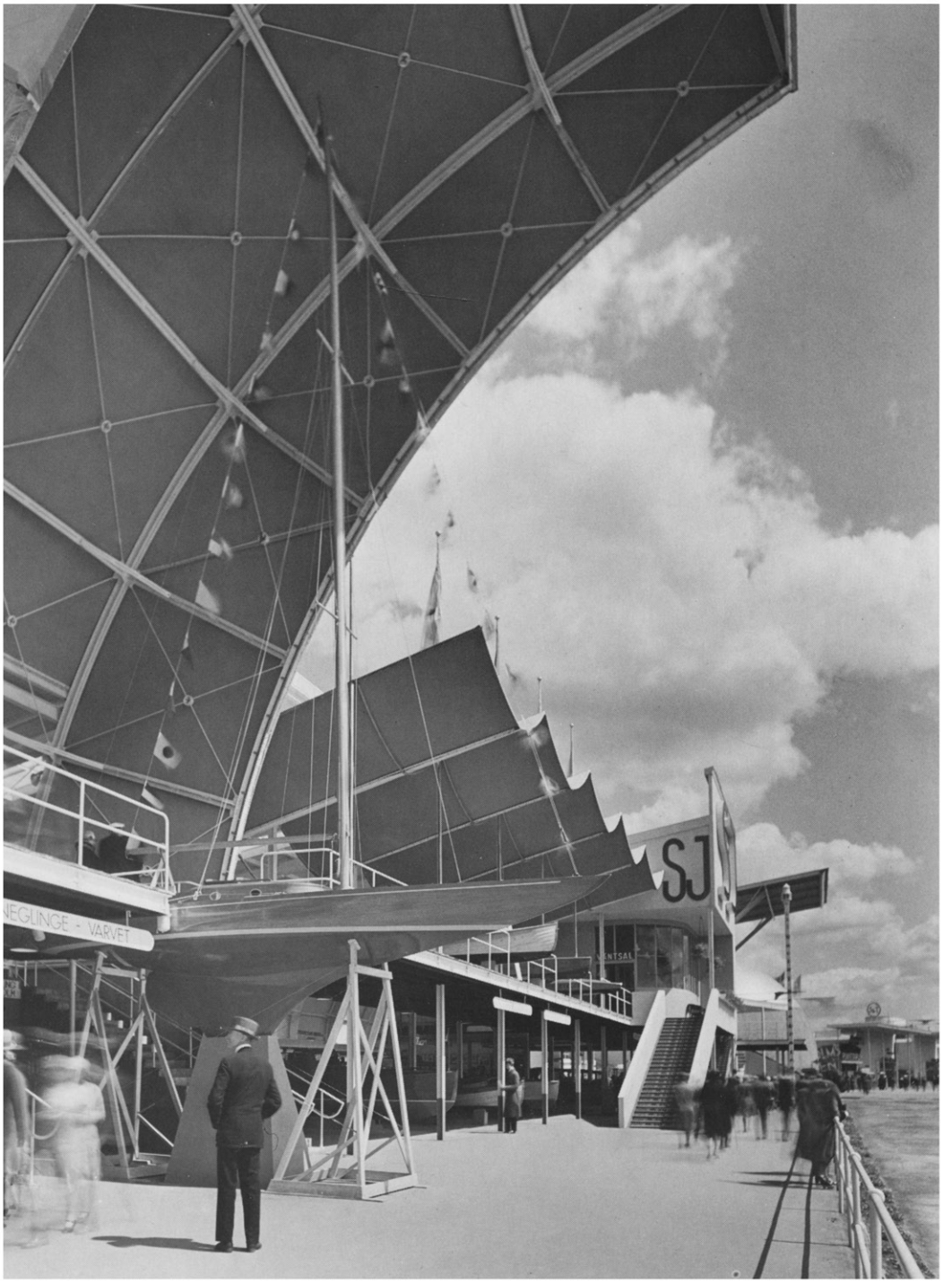
122. Stockholm Exhibition, Transportation Pavilion.



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123. Stockholm Exhibition,
Lighting Pavilion, exterior.

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124. Stockholm Exhibition, Lighting Pavilion, interior.

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On the other side of the main promenade, a series of kiosks designed by other architects gave the Corso a streetlike definition. The last kiosk signaled the beginning of the great square dominated by the advertising mast. The mast (fig. 125) was a key to the reformist rather than revolutionary enterprise the exhibition represented. Russian constructivist in origin, it nevertheless sported no revolutionary slogans, but advertised chocolates, scarves, and radios made by established companies. Though not carried out, Asplund's sketched proposal (fig. 126) shows him playing with surreal effects, such as the series of eyeglasses which, lit in sequence, would appear to be flying toward the viewer.

Behind the mast, defining the back of the square, was the Paradise Restaurant (fig. 127), the endpoint of Asplund's part of the exhibition.[101] Four stories high with a three-story interior space, which curved dramatically out at the corner, this restaurant commanded a panoramic view of the main square and the bay with Stockholm's spired skyline in the background. Two levels of interior balconies overlooked the space. Great curving canvas canopies shielded the interior from the sun. Hanging symbolically from the ceiling above the dance floor were two galloping horses, Adam, Eve, the serpent, and the apple (fig. 128).

Housing Competition, Norra Mälarstrand

In his competition entry for a group of apartment blocks at Norra Mälarstrand in Stockholm of 1932 for which he received only a mention, Asplund pursued a Modern Movement "dissolved space" urbanism.[102] In contrast to the traditional enclosed blocks on either side, he created two rows of apartment houses (each row containing three separate blocks) set perpendicular to the shore (fig. 130). While most of the other en-

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125. Stockholm Exhibition, advertising mast.

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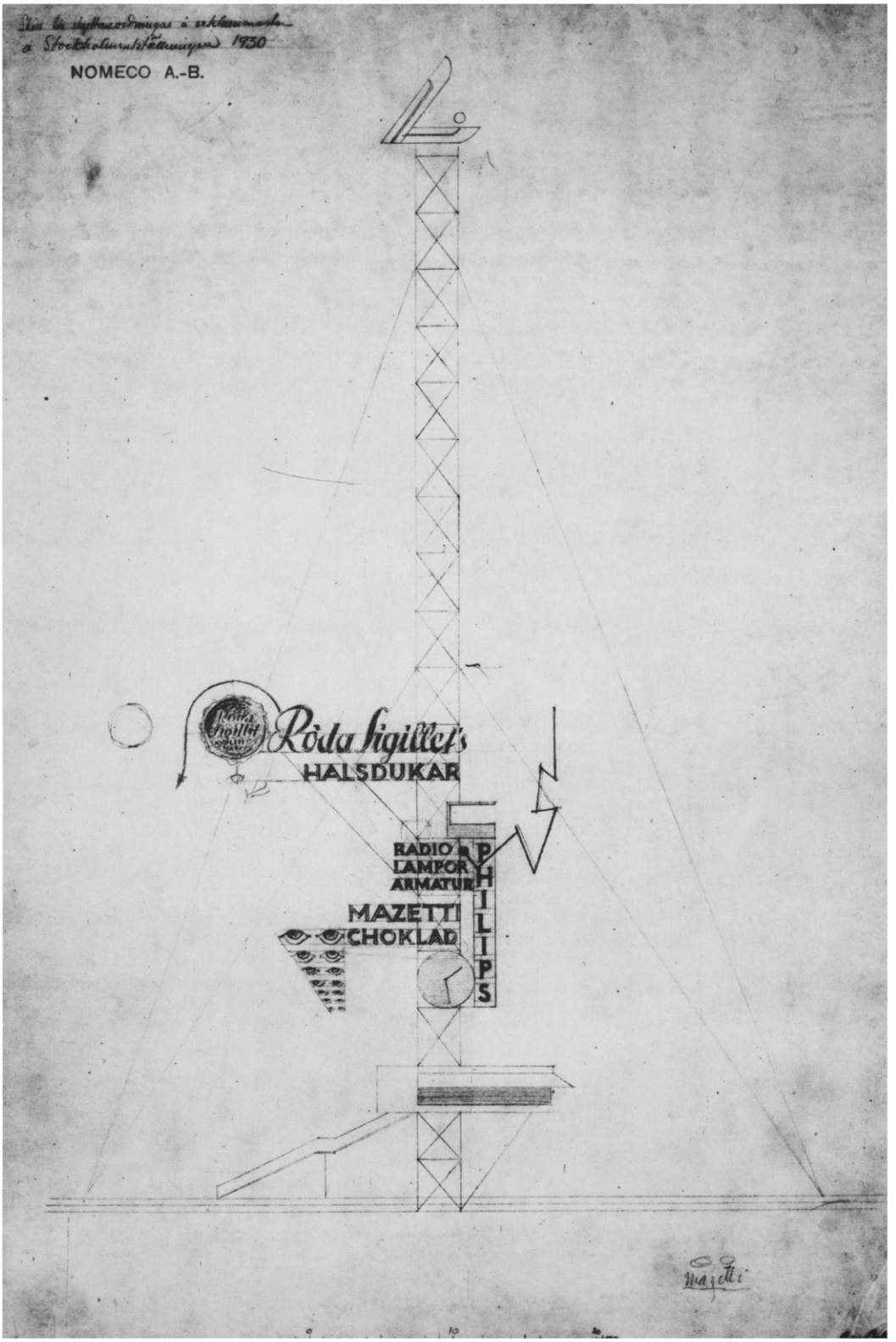

126. Stockholm Exhibition, drawing, advertising mast.

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127. Stockholm Exhibition, Paradise Restaurant, exterior.

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128. Stockholm Exhibition, Paradise Restaurant, interior.

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129. Stockholm Exhibition, Restaurant Puck.

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trants, including the winner, created two oversized and monotonous eight-story-high superblocks, Asplund set the higher blocks farther from the shore, and living room windows were cantilevered out at an angle to capture the view[103] (fig. 131). By dividing each into three smaller segments and varying their heights, he created a volumetrically much richer solution while maintaining the required density.

The Malmö Museum Competition

The same year Asplund submitted an entry to the competition for a museum in Malmö, Sweden, to be built into the 500-year-old castle Malmöhus, with its courtyard surrounded by fortification walls of which it formed one side. Asplund received no prize, but a plan of his scheme was published in *Byggmästaren,* unfortunately the only drawing that appears to have survived[104] (fig. 132).

The program called for an art museum and a natural history museum as well as the necessary accompanying administrative space. They were to be placed within the fortification walls, but the castle and the old castle court were to be preserved. The main entry into the complex was to be the portal through the castle, asymmetrically placed at one end.

Asplund's scheme created a series of layers of space, of squares within squares, by making the art museum a long and narrow L-shape defining two sides of the old castle court. This created a large outer L-shaped court defined by the fortification walls and the art museum, a court which became a concourse and a connection from the entry portal of the castle at one end to the entry to the new museums at the other end. A covered colonnade attached to the outside wall of the art museum provided a protected walk in bad weather. The peripheral approach and the layering toward the interior be-

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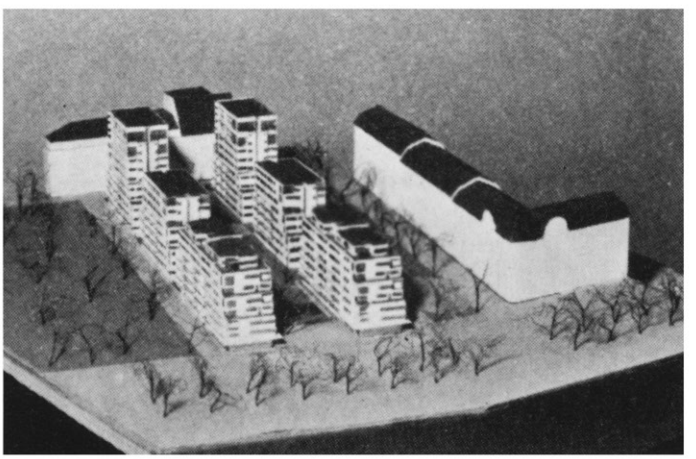

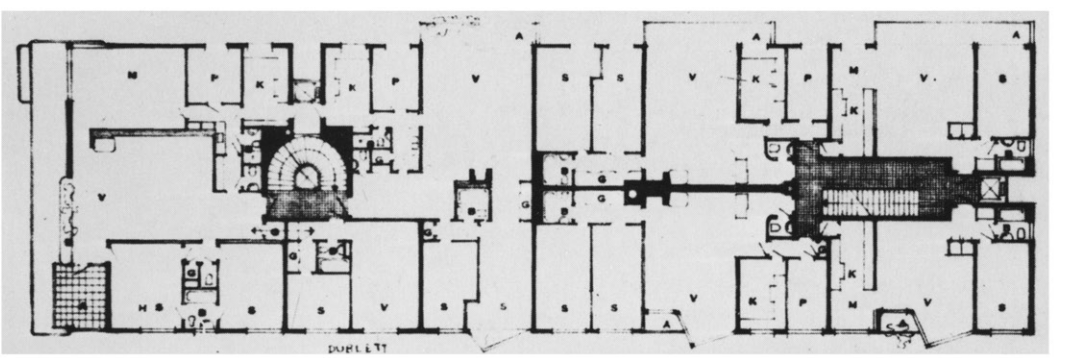

130. Housing competition, Norra Mälarstrand, Stockholm, 1932, model.

131. Housing competition, Norra Mälarstrand, plan of typical block.

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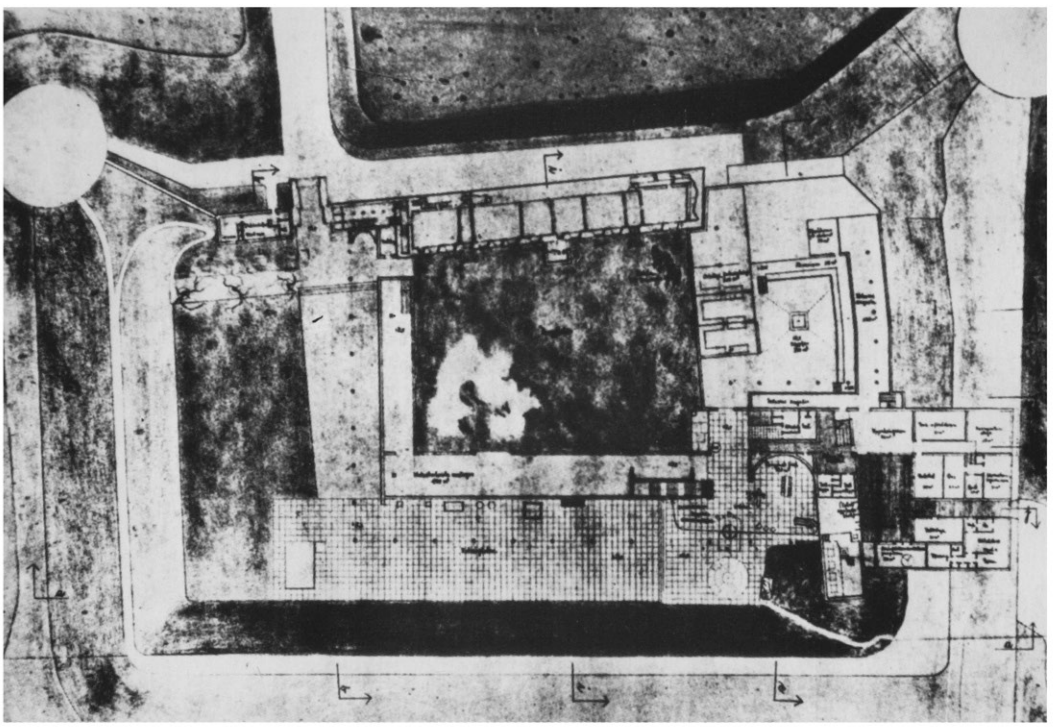

132. Malmö Museum competition, 1932, plan.

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gin to imply a spiral circulation, which Asplund further reinforced in the main hall of the natural history museum, where a ramp counterspirals up within a square, two-story, skylit space.

The administrative space, an essentially rectangular area with part of the vestibule carved out of it, is built into and through the eastern fortification wall. Here again appears the theme of a square interlocked into the wall of a larger square which Asplund had used in the pond at the Stockholm Public Library.[105]

The old castle and its fortification walls do not form a perfect rectangle; rather there is a slight skew off the parallel between the castle and the back (southern) fortification wall. In arranging his spaces Asplund played these two angles against each other, a variation of the formal plan motif of Östberg's city hall.

The Bredenberg Department Store

The next year, 1933, Asplund received his first major commission after the Stockholm Exhibition, the design of a small department store on a tight corner site in the center of Stockholm (fig. 133). Because the site was so restricted Asplund devoted much ingenuity to making floors, walls, and structure as thin as possible. The whole building displays a remarkably high level of detailing which was to set a standard for, and have a wide influence on, modern Scandinavian architecture;[106] particularly impressive in this regard are the staircase, with its finely articulated treads and display cases, and the shaped, concrete-covered steel columns (fig. 134). The building was also a testing ground for much of the detailing of the Gothenburg Law Courts of a few years later.

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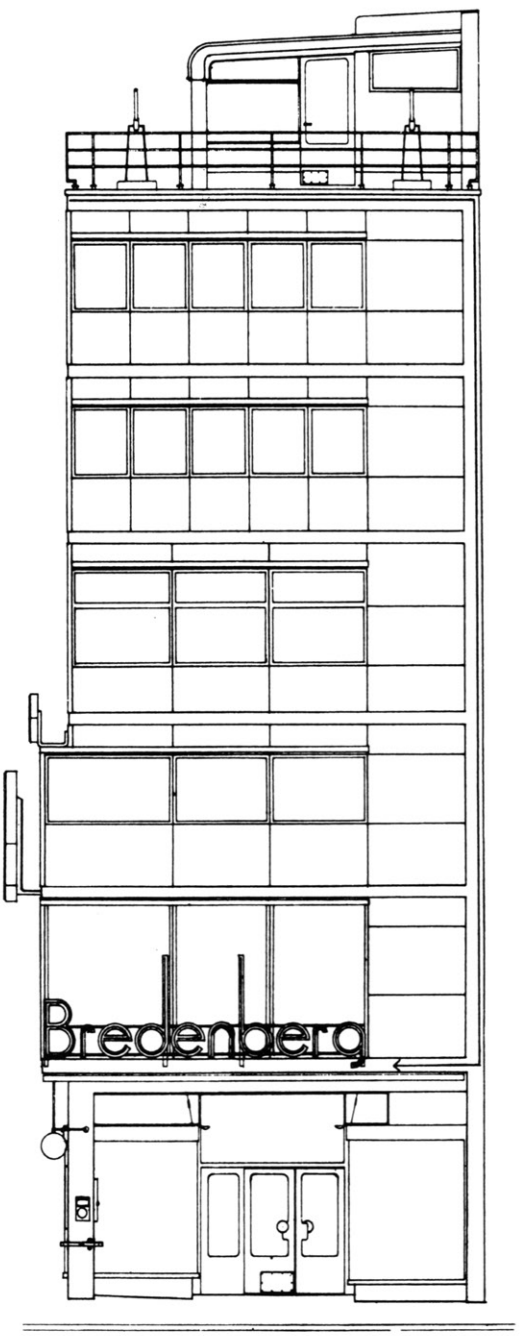

133. Bredenberg Department Store, Stockholm, 1933–1935, drawing, front elevation, showing marble-clad facade.

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134. Bredenberg Department Store, stair and display cases.

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The Reaction against Functionalism and the International Style

5

Asplund's designs for the State Bacteriological Laboratories of 1933–1937 are the first sign of a reaction against the International Style in Sweden. Unlike those late 1920s projects that were modernized while being completed,[107] this one showed that Asplund, who had already gone the whole distance, was clearly moving in the other direction. But as Hakon Ahlberg pointed out in his book,[108] Asplund probably drew some inspiration from Danish developments. Unlike Sweden, where the Stockholm Exhibition marked a turning point for architecture, Denmark had no dramatic event to signal the advent of a new era.[109] Though International Style projects by Arne Jacobsen, Mogens Lassen, Vilhelm Lauritzen, and others gradually began to make their appearance from the early 1930s onward, the prevalent trend in Danish architecture involved the integration of certain modernist detailing with the pitched-roof vernacular best exemplified by the housing projects of Kay Fisker and Paul Baumann. Fisker's winning competition entry for Aarhus University of 1931 (done with C. F. Moller and Paul Stegmann) is perhaps the best example of this integration, and, with its brick exteriors and "traditional" (as opposed to strip) windows, the likeliest to have inspired Asplund.

But it was not until 1935 and 1936 that the reaction against functionalism took on a clear definition. In those two years Asplund produced the final designs for the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex, the Woodland Crematorium; his own summer house, Stennäs, at Lisön, Sorunda; and the Kviberg Crematorium.

The bacteriological laboratories, the law courts annex, his summer house, and even to some extent the Woodland Crematorium were to become important prototypes in the Scandinavian opposition to the International Style that gathered force in the late 1930s and

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became widespread in the 1940s.[110] Yet in its intensity and its clear division from the international mainstream, Asplund's work stood alone in the late 1930s in Scandinavia. Descriptive of much of the work of those who followed in his footsteps was the coinage *Tradifunkis,* a blend of the slang words for *traditional* and *functional,* which served as the motto for one competition entry from this period.[111] Though much of this work broke with the International Style, functionalist tenets were still its basis. Among the best work to come out of this movement were Arne Jacobsen's Aarhus Town Hall of 1940–1941, which showed a clear debt to Asplund's law courts annex in Gothenburg; Nils Ahrbom's and Helge Zimdahl's Linköping Museum of 1937, and Erik Bryggman's burial chapel in Turku of 1939–1941, as well as his later villa at Kusto, obviously inspired by Asplund's own summer house.

Alvar Aalto, who in the 1930s was quickly establishing himself as Asplund's equal both as an innovative designer and an independent thinker, took a somewhat different course in his work. In the latter part of the decade he appeared to be concerned with expanding and modifying the vocabulary of the International Style to incorporate his lyrical wood detailing. His famous world's fair pavilions are clearly modernist in conception, though they introduced the use of a traditional material on a large scale.

But Aalto's and Asplund's shared attitudes toward the prevailing trend had their source in a critique of functionalism. As the two architects were good friends, it would not be surprising if this agreement grew partly out of discussion.[112] But Aalto was the first to formulate it publicly, in a speech entitled "Rationalism and Man" that he gave in May 1935 to a meeting of the Swedish

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Arts and Crafts Society[113] for which Asplund was no doubt present. Aalto criticized the functionalists' narrow conception of rational design, using as examples objects such as modern chairs and lamps. He said:

"In other words, we can say that one of the ways to arrive at a more and more humanely built environment is to expand the concept *rational.* We should rationally analyze more of the requirements connected with the object than we have to date," and continued:

A series of requirements that can be made of almost every object and that up to now has been given scant consideration surely belongs in the sphere of another science—psychology. As soon as we include psychological requirements, or, let us say, when we can do so, then we will have already expanded the rational method to an extent that, to a greater degree than previously, has the potential of excluding inhuman results.

A year later, Asplund gave a speech entitled "Art and Technology" to the Swedish Architectural Association.[114] Less ambitious than Aalto's address, it must have been inspired by a need to explain his work of the last year and a half. He observed, "One should not conceive of utility as an end in itself but merely as a means to increase choice and well-being for people in this life. Technology does not suffice to achieve this; what I would call art must also be an ingredient." He continued:

The idea that only design, which is comprehended visually, can be art is a narrow conception. No, everything grasped by our other senses through our whole human consciousness and which has the capacity to communicate desire, pleasure, or emotions can also be art.

Addressing himself to standardization and housing he went on:

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The joining of Art and Technology in the production of housing should mean a melding of human proportions and human expressiveness on one hand with an economic and technologically necessary standardization on the other.

Though Aalto and Asplund had the same goal, the humanization of design, the difference in their formulation at this time is illuminating. While Aalto spoke optimistically of expanding the concept of "rational," Asplund spoke of the intangible "art."[115]

The State Bacteriological Laboratories

In 1933 Asplund won first prize in an invited competition for the State Bacteriological Laboratories to be built on an open site on the outskirts of Stockholm. In addition to the main laboratory building, set on an oak-covered knoll and consisting of two linked but separate annexes (separated to control the spread of dangerous bacteria), the complex included a series of outbuildings to house laboratory animals. The program required that they be placed at least twenty meters apart (again for purposes of isolation), which accounts for the spread-out arrangement (fig. 135). The plain, brick gate (fig. 136) attached to the guard buildings marks the entry to the extensive, asymmetrically composed layout. The buildings respond to each other's presence and to the flow of the curving access road.

The buildings, finished in 1937, are different in layout from the winning scheme of 1933, but the facade of the earlier scheme and the planned use of yellow brick indicate that Asplund had already abandoned the pristine vocabulary of the International Style. The tightly spaced, traditional windows were to become typical of his subsequent "office" projects (figs. 137, 138).

The main building contains three stories of laboratories and offices arranged around a high interior space

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lit by a continuous clerestory (fig. 139). Standing free at the back of this space, attached to the balcony corridors only by small bridges, is a three-story cold-storage chamber for serums and bacterial cultures designed in the form of a giant domestic refrigerator (fig. 140). A large spiral staircase, which gradually narrows as it ascends, is placed asymmetrically in front of it.

While this is to all appearances a functional and antiseptic central space in a laboratory building, the giant refrigerator is startling and takes on a strong iconic value. It becomes the key to a remarkable symbolic, even surreal, reading of the building and the interior space that Asplund has allowed us. The refrigerator becomes, in the context of its times, a monument of our modern power over life and death, its dominating form within the space equivalent to the interior stupas in the early Buddhist cave temples in India. A study of the composition of the plan suggests a primitive torso with the central space as a womb (figs. 141, 142). The awkward "umbilical cord" corridor connection to building B (fig. 143), where serums are prepared, and building C, the power plant, reinforces the imagery. Thus the refrigerator becomes also the embryo within the womb.

The lamps lining the high central space complete the reading. Hung by thin, almost imperceptible wires from the balconies above, the lamps give the impression that the glass globes are actually held up by the slender metal piping, containing the electrical wiring, coming out at a sloping angle from the walls (fig. 144). But experience tells us that it is virtually impossible for the glass globe to be cantilevered out so far by such a slender rod without bending it. The globes thus appear to be on the verge of falling, like fully formed drops of liquid emerging from the tip of a hypodermic needle.

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135. State Bacteriological Laboratories, Stockholm, 1933–1937, site plan.

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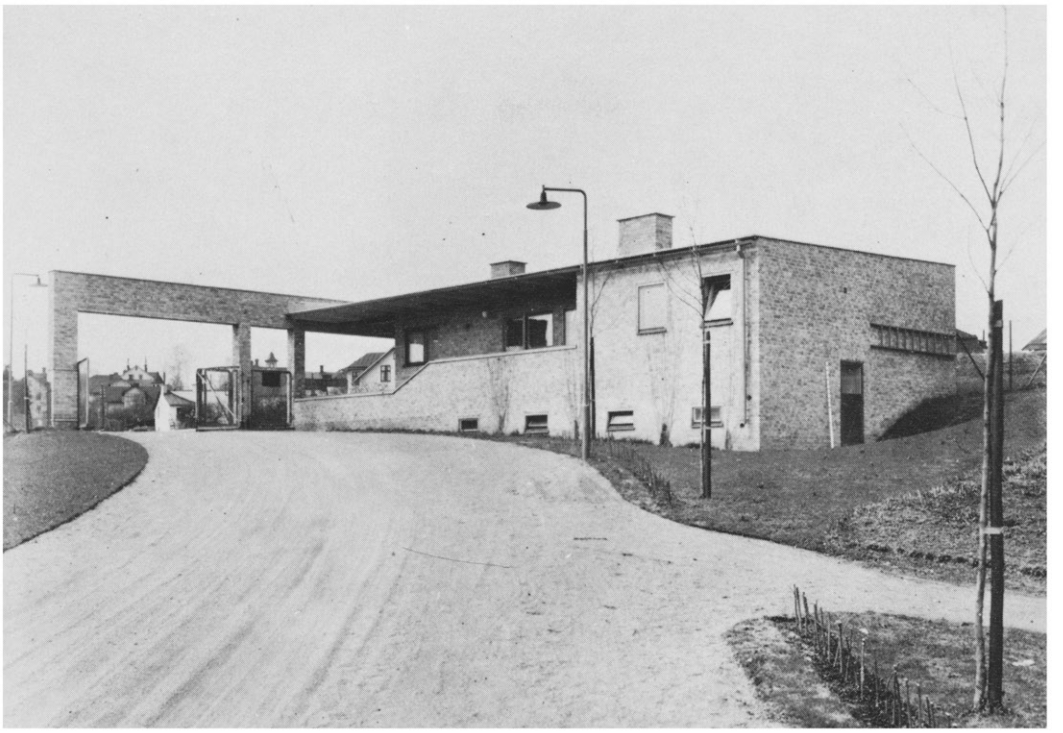

136. State Bacteriological Laboratories, entry gate with guard's building.

137. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, exterior.

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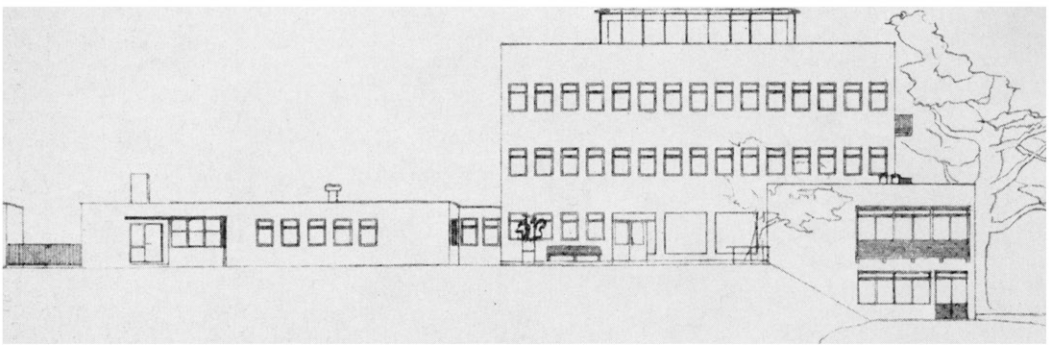

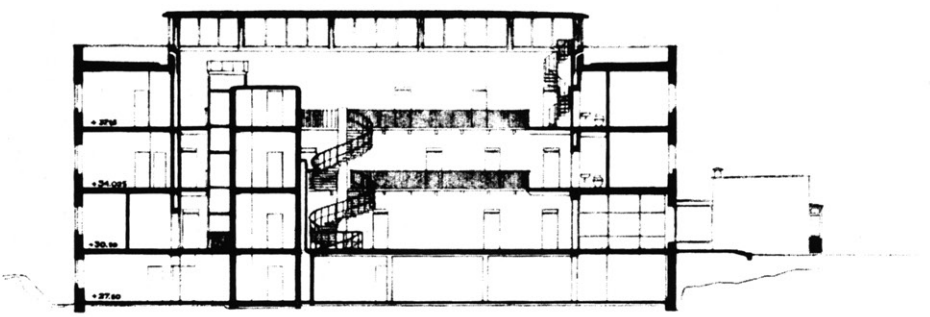

138. State Bacteriological Laboratories, drawing, front facade.

139. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, section.

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140. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, interior.

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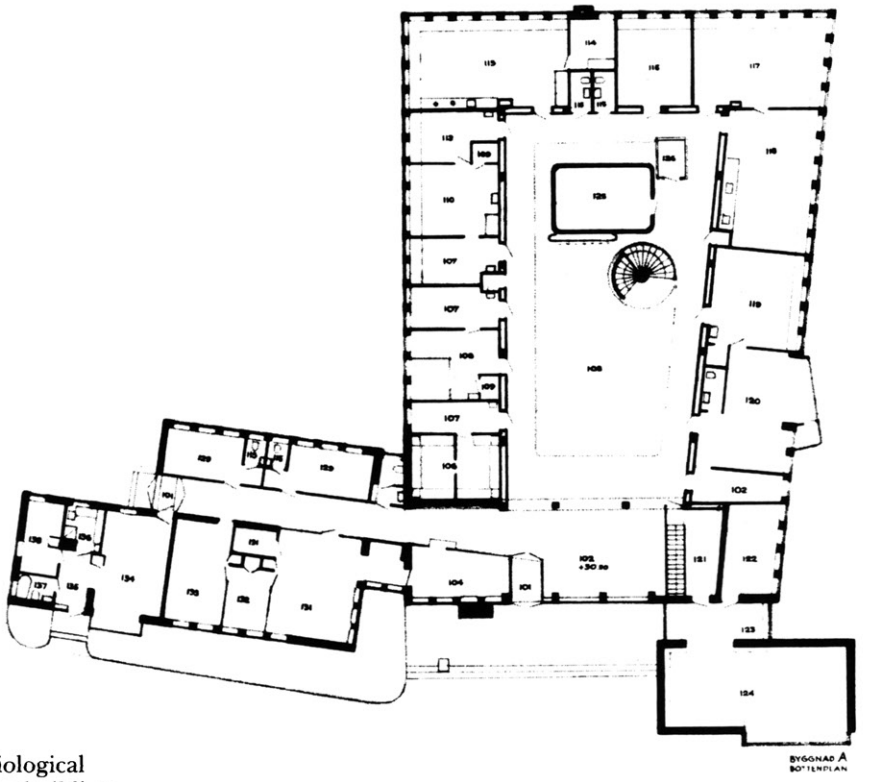
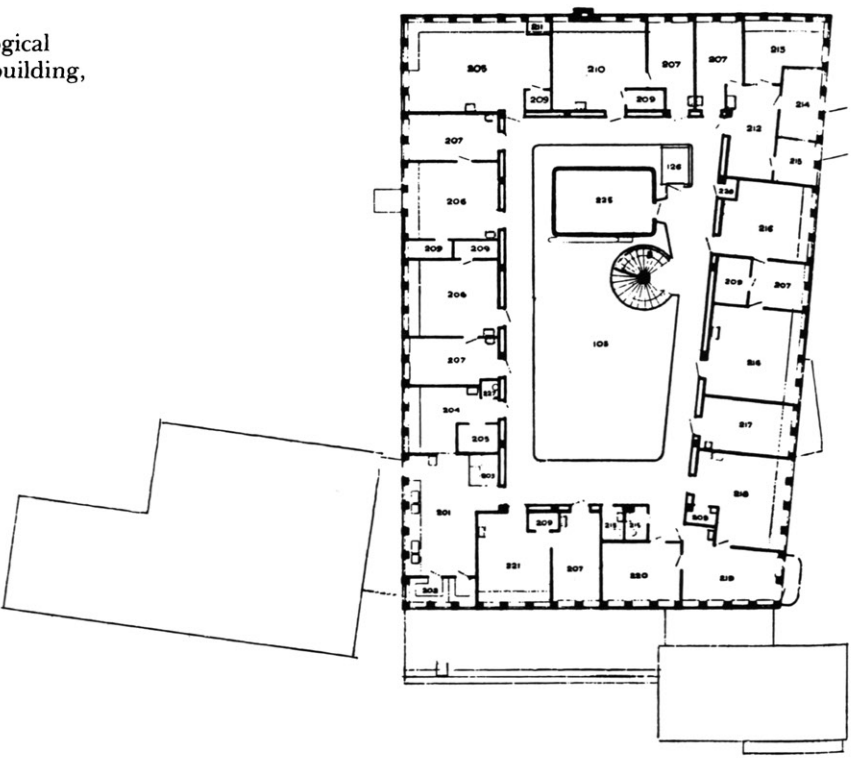


141. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, ground floor plan.



142. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, second floor plan.

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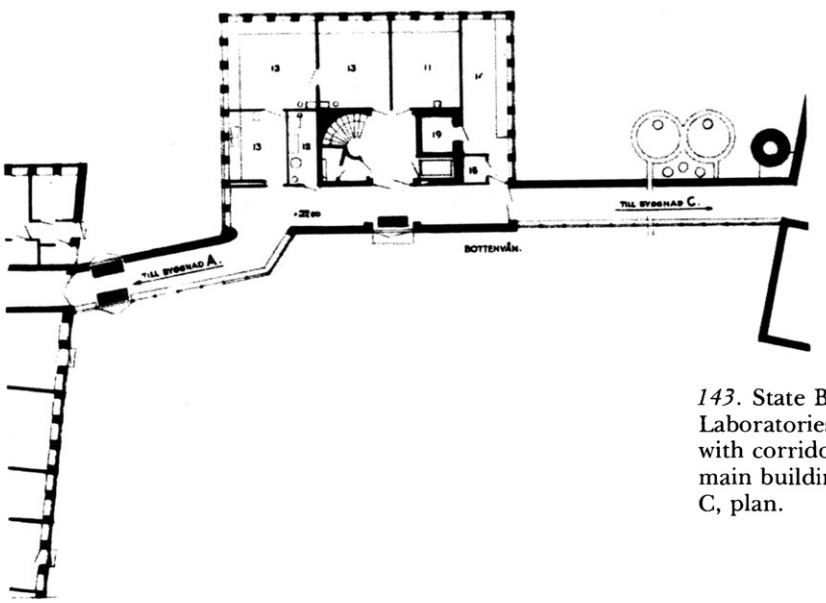

143. State Bacteriological Laboratories, building B with corridor connections to main building and building C, plan.

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144. State Bacteriological Laboratories, main building, detail of interior.

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Asplund's use of images is seldom overt, though usually one detail, such as the bulging balusters in the Lister County Courthouse or the refrigerator in the bacteriological laboratories, is made obvious. Instead, he evokes them subtly by imparting to the object or plan he has designed some property basic to the object or process he is evoking. Had he designed the armature of the lamps to look exactly like hypodermic needles they might have been merely bizarre. But there is a studied elusiveness and an exquisite ambiguity in his work, for while the associations that enter the mind of the observer tell him that a consistent metaphor is being developed, yet, on a more obvious level, as in the case of the bacteriological laboratories, the building is merely what it is functionally supposed to be.

If the symbolism is appropriate to the purpose of the building, it nonetheless might be considered highly unorthodox and brings up the question of its interpretation. One suspects that Asplund arrived at the images in an intuitive manner based on his own deeply felt reactions to them, rather than through a rigorous intellectual process.[116] If they find an instinctive response in us, there is yet a free associational quality to them which leaves their meaning ambiguous. However, Asplund's vision, while ostensibly reverential, almost religious, appears to have a strong undertone of angst.

The plan of the main building embodies similar compositional principles with some variation, such as Asplund employed in the Villa Snellman. The low wings attached to it align perpendicularly in an "interwoven" manner with the exterior walls of the rhomboidal main building. The main three-story building mass once again brings to mind Östberg's Stockholm City Hall. Though they are in a sense worlds apart one may guess that an initial impulse for the central space of the

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laboratory building may have come from Östberg's monumental Blue Hall, also lit by a clerestory, in the Stockholm City Hall.

Gothenburg Law Courts Annex

The design history evolution of the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex is a long one, having started in 1913. It has been well documented[117] and has even become a celebrated case study of the evolution of a building. It will suffice to relate it briefly here. Asplund won a competition for the building in 1913 with a National Romantic project which fused old and new buildings into a new entity which in hindsight seems neither in scale nor vocabulary to have been very sympathetic to the existing square.

As early as 1915 Asplund had changed the exterior to a classical one as part of an overall proposal for Gustaf Adolf Square, but it was not until the 1918 competition for the square that the existing building and the addition emerged as separate entities. After evolving further through a number of classical designs that seem to correspond to Asplund's development in his other projects, the annex building was given something approximating its classical modernist facade in 1935 (fig. 145).

Faced with a highly conservative building committee as well as his own desire to fit his addition harmoniously into the historic surroundings, Asplund strove in his final exterior designs for a melding of modernism and classicism. After construction had begun in 1936 he changed the facade again by pulling in the roof line and moving the windows off center (figs. 146, 147, 148). This change implied an asymmetrical secondary grid and probably represented his desire to increase the modernist articulation of the still quite traditional facade as well as his natural predilection for a more com-

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plex and mannered solution. The asymmetrically placed windows also emphasized the subordinate relationship of the new addition to the existing building.

As the exterior evolved, so did the central court. In the original proposal of 1913 the open courtyard of the existing building was to be glassed over. With the articulation of two distinct buildings, a separate interior court for the annex evolved. By 1920, the year he was also doing the courthouse in Solvesborg, the interior court was round, lined with columns, behind which curved the double peripheral stairs so typical of Asplund. But in the context of the annex the round hall was cramped, and in a proposal of 1925 it had become square and the vocabulary had evolved from an Italianate baroque to a strict Schinkelesque neoclassicism (fig. 149).

Though the final shape of the space and the organization of the plan retained the general lines of the 1925 solution, its transformation was nonetheless radical (figs. 150, 151). Qualitatively the most important change was the opening up of the ground floor to the exterior courtyard. But the space was also transformed from hard-edged to soft-edged, and the surrounding walls, formerly massive and weighty, became light, almost weightless in appearance.[118] The architectural vocabulary changed from classical to modern. If the interior as built retains a tenuous relationship with its classical origins (the scheme of 1925), it also owes a debt to certain late-nineteenth-century skylit interiors which sported freestanding glass and steel elevator shafts and staircases.[119] Layered vertically by the cantilevered balconies, lit by natural light filtered from the side and from above, and with its freestanding staircase disappearing mysteriously into a brightly lit opening in the ceiling adjacent to the skylight, the main interior

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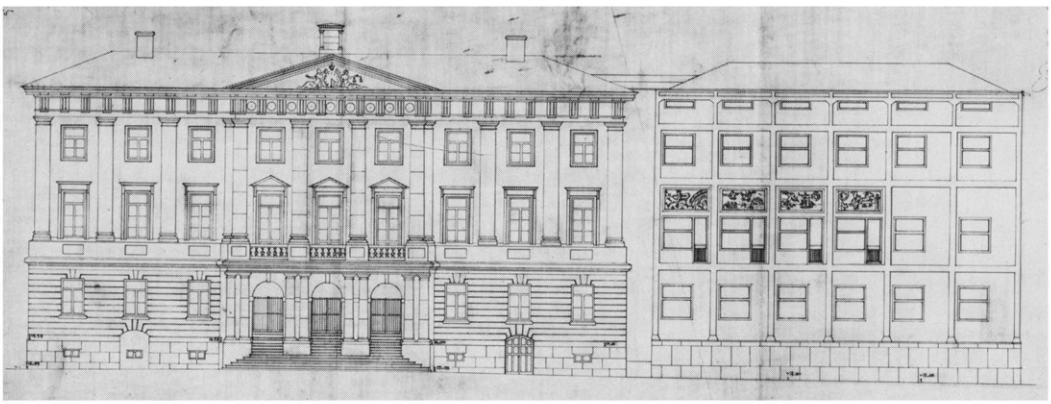

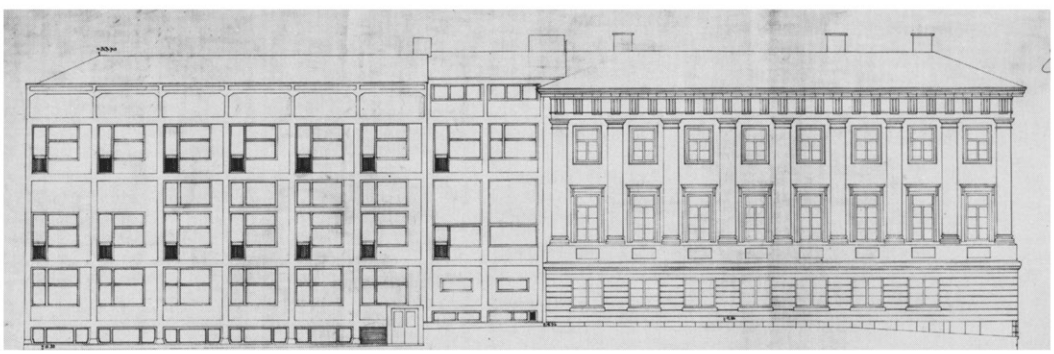

145. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, 1934–1937, drawing, front facade, 1935.

146. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, drawing, final front facade, 1936.

147. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, drawing, back facade, 1936.

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148. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, facade toward Gustaf Adolf Square.

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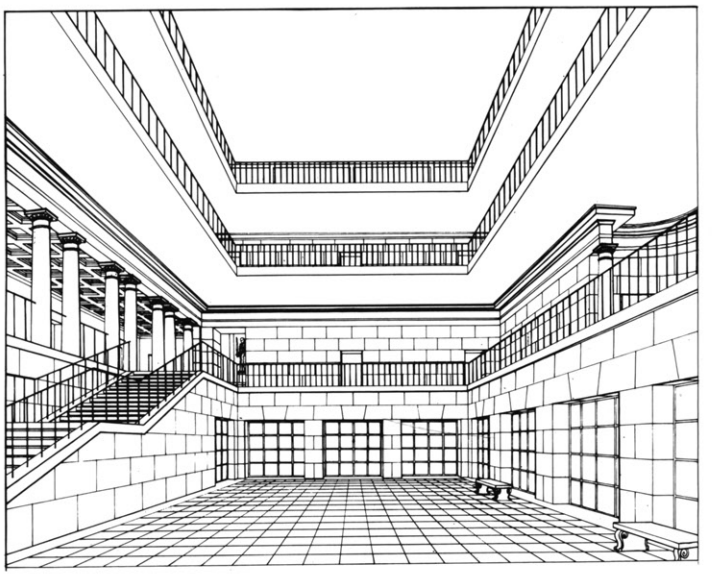
149. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, drawing, interior perspective, scheme of 1925.



150. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, main interior hall.

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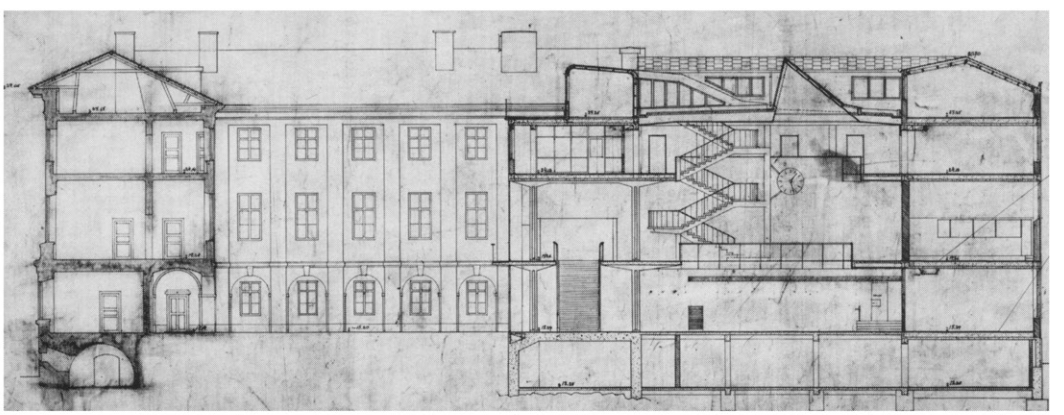

151. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, section.

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space also took on a Piranesian "spaces beyond" quality.[120]

Within the space, Asplund, conjuring with forms, seems to have reduced, if not suspended, the forces of gravity. The cantilevered balconies, lit from below by an early version of track lighting, appear, especially in the evening, to float, to be held down rather than up by the taut sculpted columns which support beams that fuse into the floor slab and are as easily read as being in tension as in compression (fig. 152). The main staircase, which one ascends effortlessly because of the shallow treads, is actually hung from the floor above, but appears to span an impossible distance (fig. 153). The elevator, in its light steel and glass shaft (fig. 154) glides effortlessly up and down, while at the other end of the space the freestanding staircase (fig. 155), reduced to its bare essentials, appears to flow down like a gentle cascade, making a pool on the floor below. The lamps, balanced against each other on either side of the columns, float freely in the space (fig. 145).

But the lamps also clearly allude to the scales of justice and are the symbolic detail that probably provides the key to an interpretation of the plan of the main floor, with its two limp, curved courtrooms, which have an awkward, almost child-drawn character (fig. 156). I would argue that it was intended by Asplund as a purposefully primitive symbol of Justitia, the goddess of justice. In his project of 1920 he had a statue of Justitia holding the scales in the central rotunda, but here the shapes of two central courtrooms and in general the soft, curving lines of the interior symbolize the female goddess. In speaking of the building Asplund called it a "U-shaped body oriented toward the old courtyard."[121] Viewed thus, the plan does in fact suggest a primitively drawn female body.[122]

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The refined modern detailing in the interior owed much to Asplund's earlier Bredenberg Department Store, as already mentioned, and was itself to have a strong impact on Scandinavian architecture. Railing, stair, and column details quickly became absorbed into the general modernist vocabulary. Thus they clearly had a favorable effect in raising the general level of detailing, but in the process they lost the intensity of the original, where they had been orchestrated to a greater theme.

Asplund's and Aalto's use of wood in their buildings parallel each other closely in the 1930s. But the limp curves of Asplund's courtroom walls and judges' desks at Gothenburg (figs. 157, 158) are in marked contrast to the dynamic forms Aalto employed both in the Viipuri Library and the Finnish pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. The influences in this area that may have flowed back and forth at this time between the two architects remain to be explored in detail.[123]

The lighting fixtures in the building were particularly fine. The coupled lamps (fig. 159) have already been mentioned. The composite lighting fixture lining the window walls of the courtroom (fig. 160) appears to have its source in the traditional sconce. (Botanical analogies would also be appropriate.) Each light is actually two, one set in the middle of the reflecting plate to give indirect light, the other aimed at the ceiling.

Asplund designed all the furniture in the building. Of particular interest are the judges' chairs (fig. 161), whose importance as a prototype for post-World War II Danish furniture design is one of the many still unexplored influences of the building.

Other details of interest include the "paragraph" rug, which Asplund designed (fig. 162) and which almost

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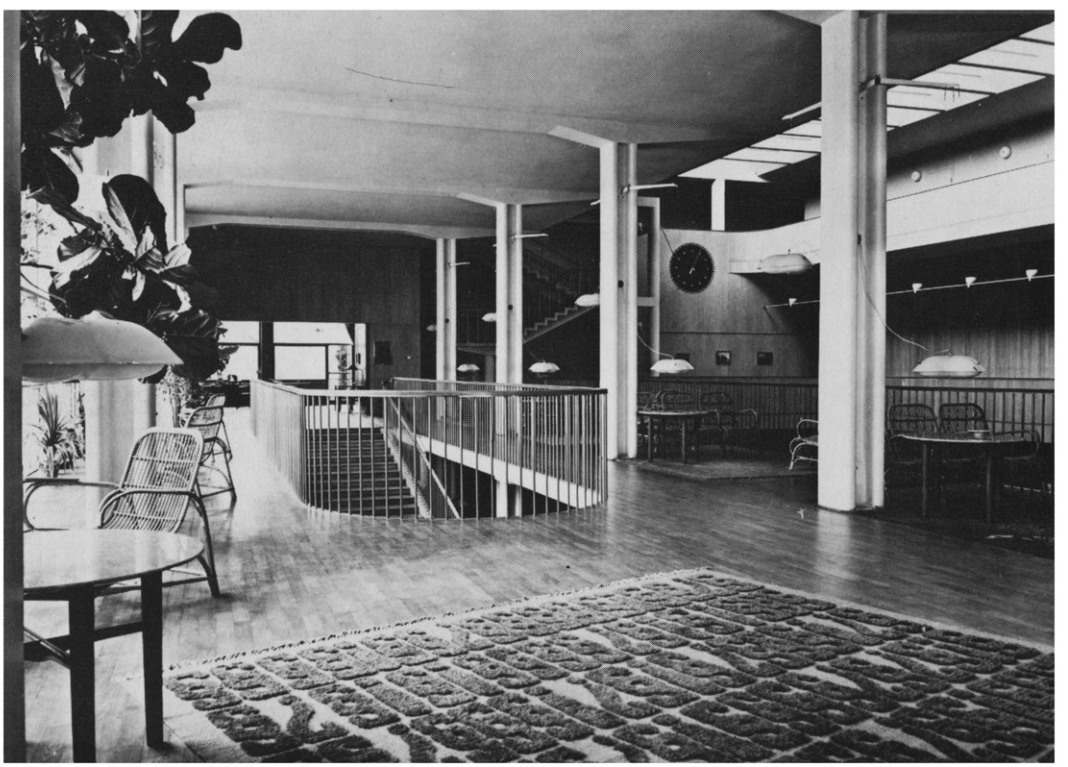

152. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, main floor, waiting area.

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153. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, facade toward interior courtyard.

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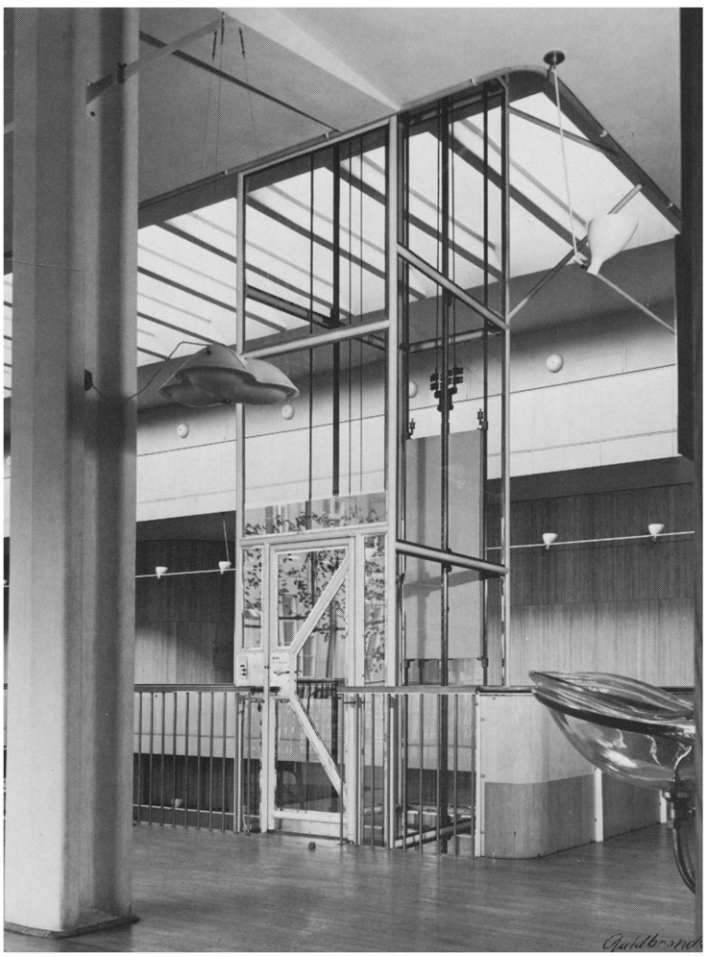

154. Law Courts Annex,
Gothenburg, elevator shaft.

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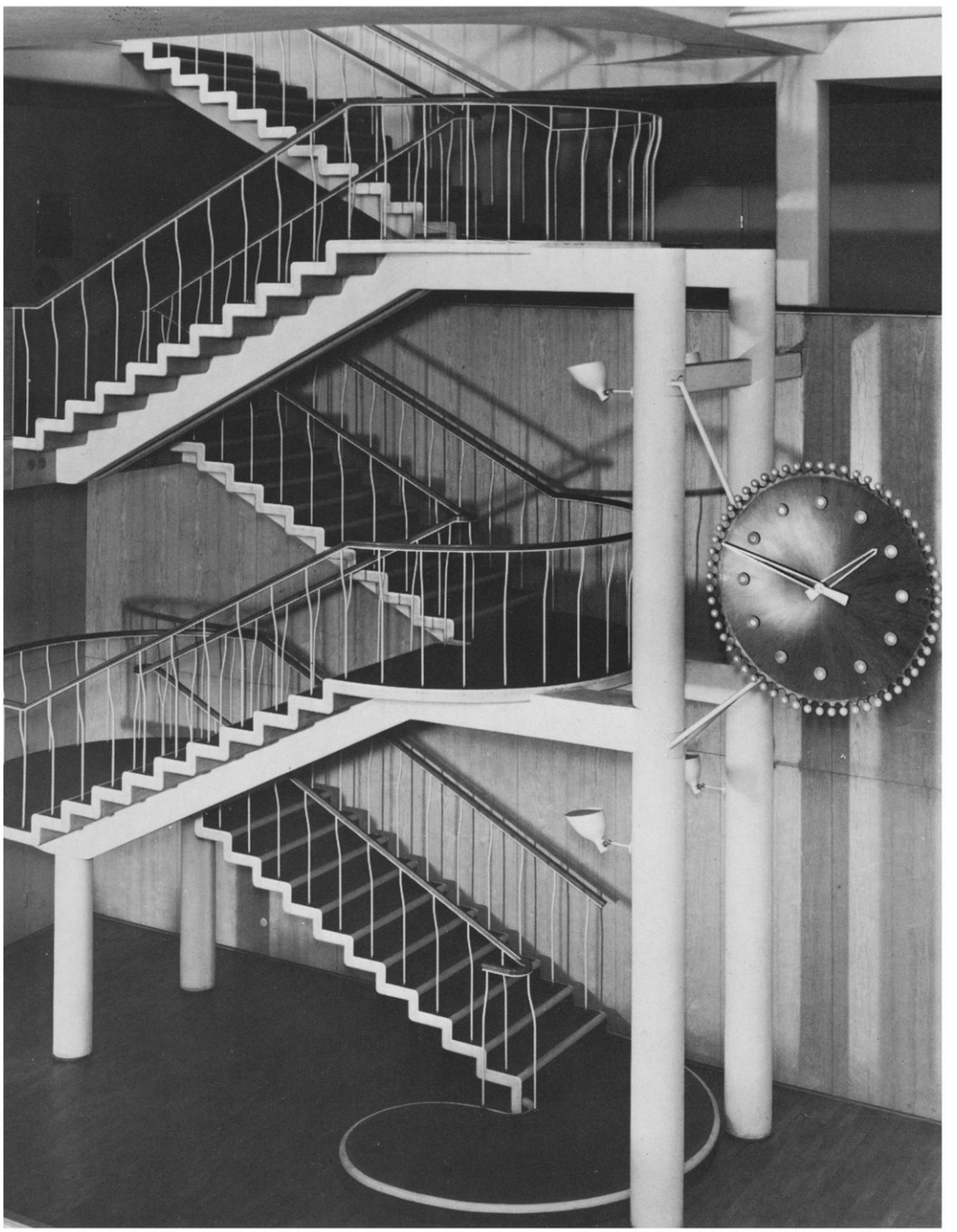
155. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, staircase in main hall.



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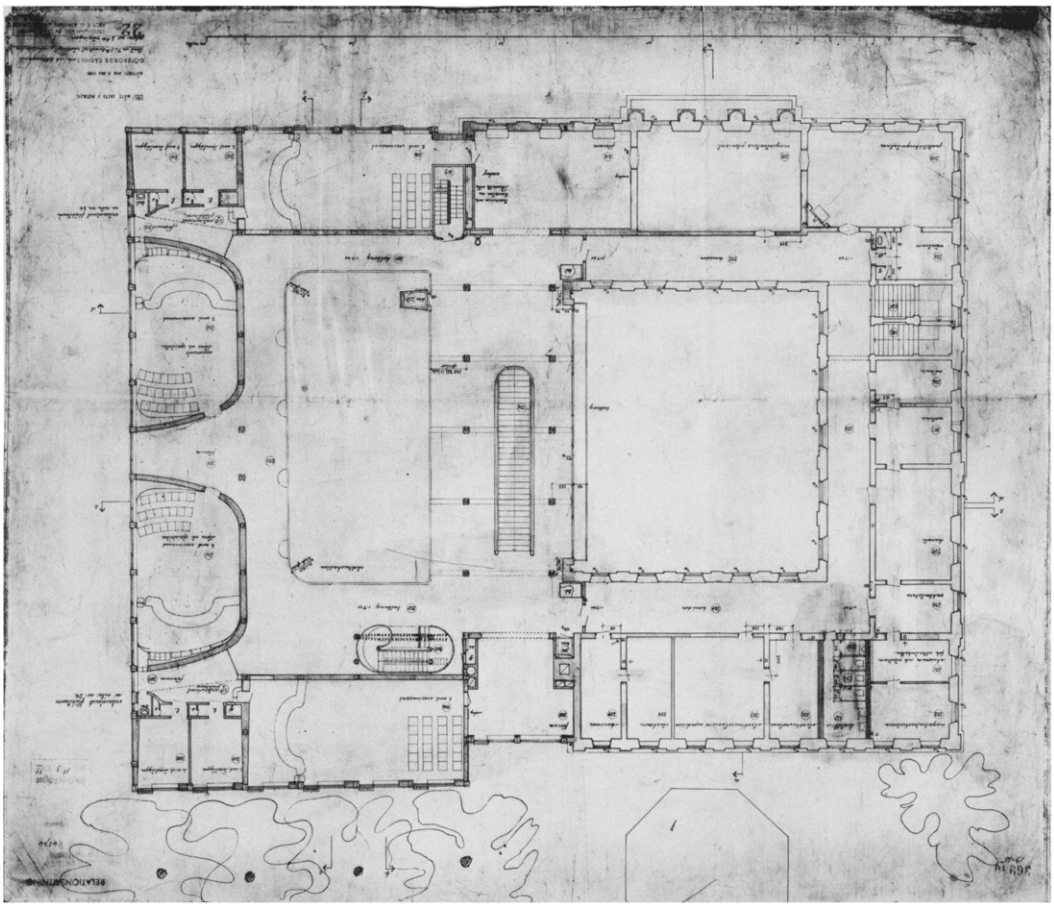

156. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, main floor plan with courtrooms.

157. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, courtroom.

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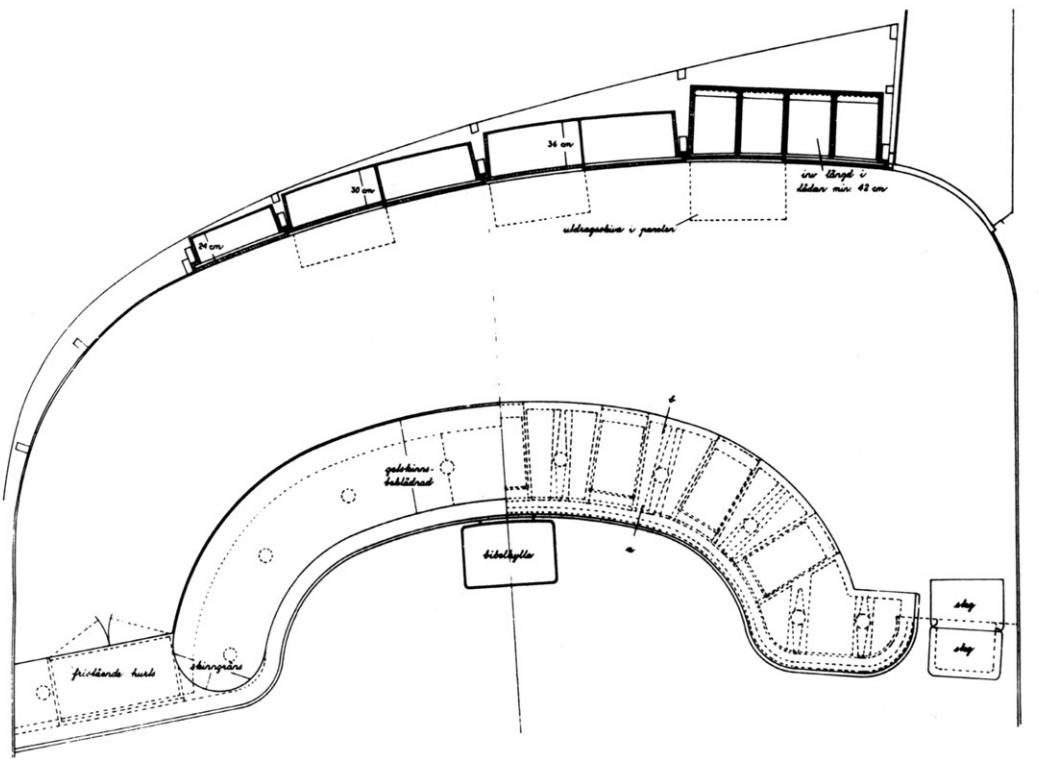

158. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, drawing, plan of judge's desk in courtroom, detail.

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159. Law Courts Annex,
Gothenburg, lamp.

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160. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, lamp in courtroom.

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161. Law Courts Annex,
Gothenburg, judge's chair.

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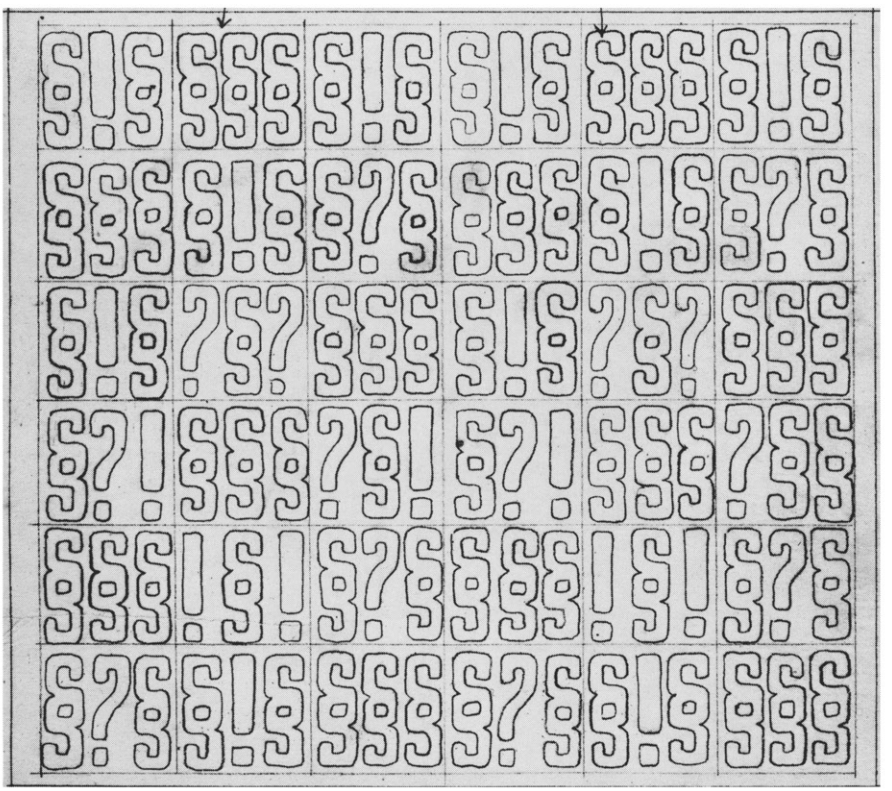

162. Law Courts Annex, Gothenburg, drawing of "paragraph" rug.

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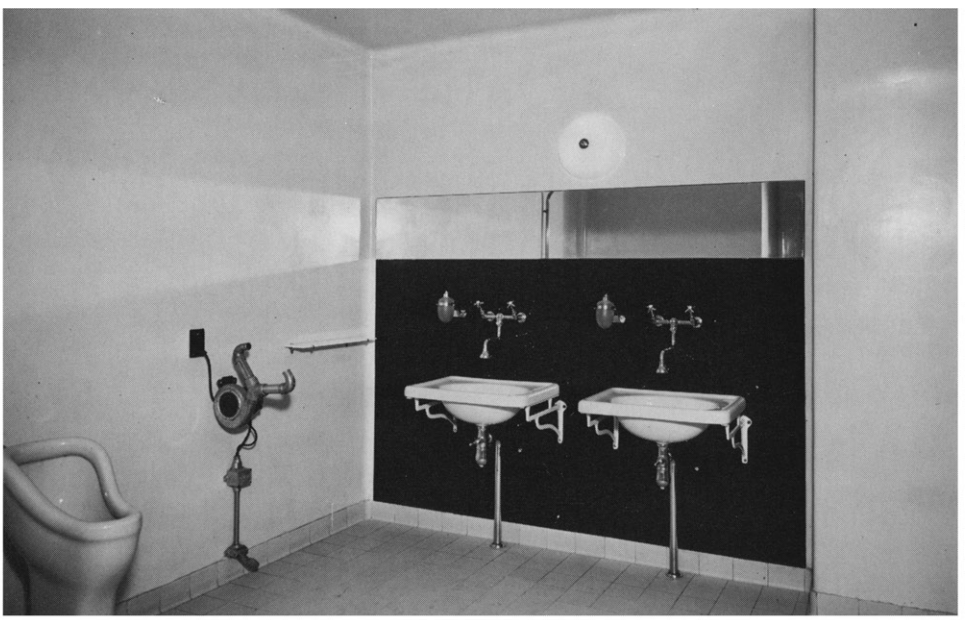

163. Law Courts Annex,
Gothenburg, men's lavatory.

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seems to anticipate certain themes in American art after World War II. And finally, the studied Bauhaus arrangement of plumbing fixtures in the lavatories (fig. 163) betrays a deadpan humor.

The Bromma Airport Competition and the Stockholm Tower

In 1934 and 1935 Asplund designed two projects, one the competition entry for the Bromma Airport (fig. 164) and the other a proposal for a great tower in Stockholm (fig. 165), neither of them realized, which pose some questions about his whole approach to architecture. Both are highly futurist projects, the airport streamlined, the tower constructivist, with reference both to the Eiffel Tower and Tatlin's monument to the Third International.

These projects seem to have little stylistic connection with his earlier or his later work; with either the modest, straightforward vocabulary of the bacteriological laboratories or the more traditional mode of the crematoria. They can perhaps be understood if we see Asplund as concerned with a striving for significance, for the significant image that becomes the symbol of the building and its program, an approach to architecture with its roots in romantic classicism and one which was well understood in the nineteenth century.[124] Thus, in the Bromma Airport project, Asplund, rather than taking a past or present architectural vocabulary as a point of departure, has turned to the new world of forms springing up around the airplane. In the Stockholm Tower he has gone to the same engineering sources as Eiffel and the constructivists before him.

Gunnar Asplund's Summer Cottage, Stennäs

In 1936, Asplund, recently remarried, built a summer house in the archipelago near Stockholm. The site, at the end of a small bay with open meadows sloping gently to the water and a ridgelike granite outcropping,

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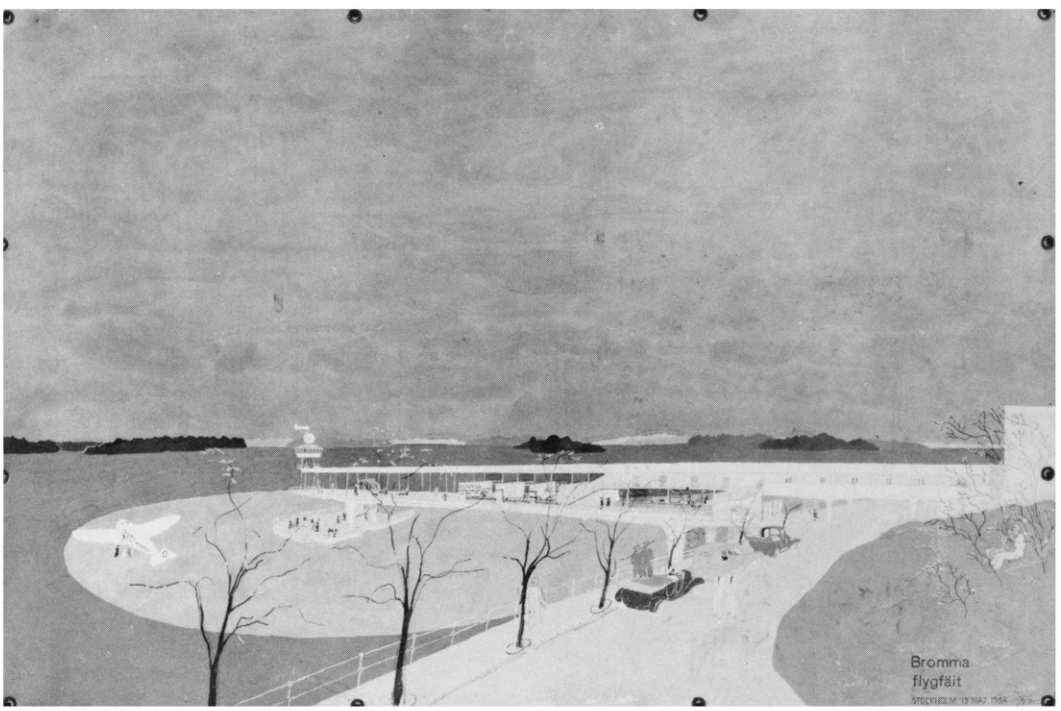

164. Competition entry, Bromma Airport, Stockholm, 1934, gouache, perspective, exterior.

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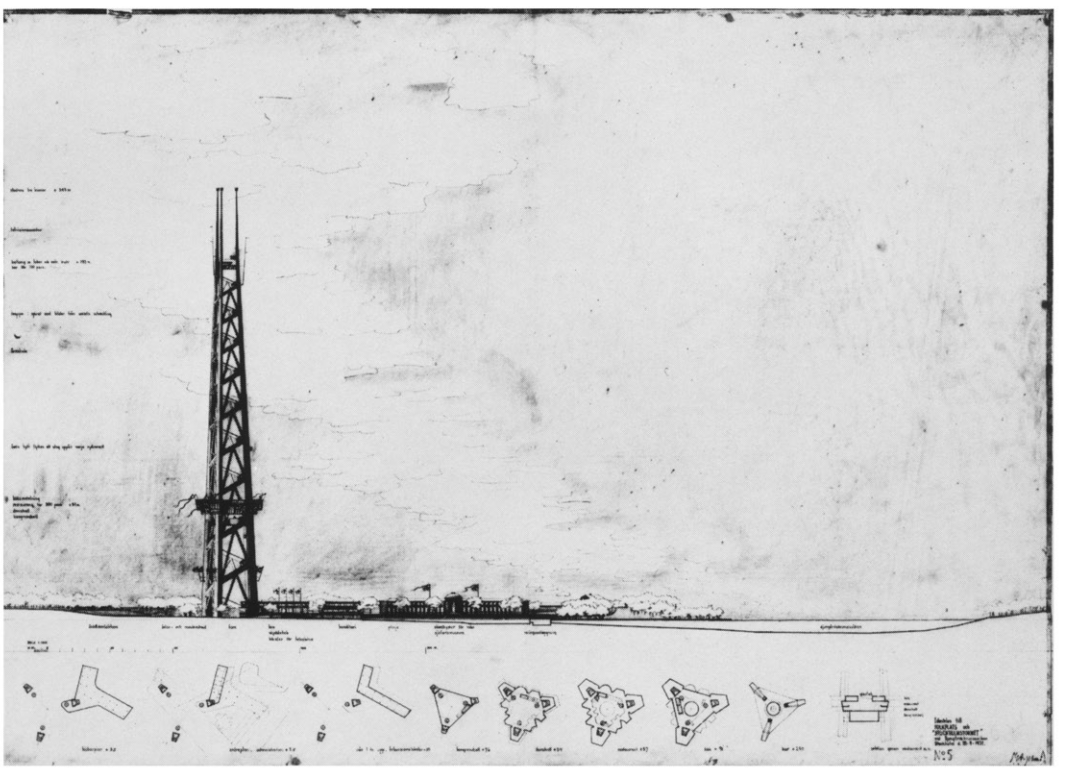

165. Project for Stockholm Tower, 1935, drawing, elevation.

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166. Stennäs, Gunnar
Asplund's summer cottage,
Lisön, Sorunda, exterior.

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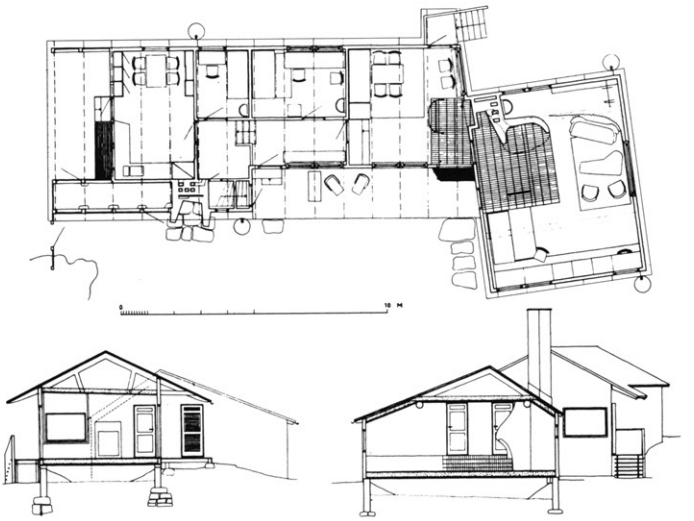

167. Stennäs, plan and sections.

168. Stennäs, living room.

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is in itself a Scandinavian's summer dream. Asplund placed his one-story vernacular cottage, sheathed in narrow planks of wood horizontally laid, at the edge of the rock facing the bay (fig. 166). A variation on the head-tail theme, the house has its multipurpose living room set a few steps down, sheered to one side and given a slight twist in response to the view out to the open sea (fig. 167), almost like someone who stretches his neck sideways and turns his head in order to see better. The interior of the living room is dominated by the oversized fireplace (not unlike a giant nose inhaling fire), protruding threateningly through the roof (fig. 167). The shallow brick stairs of the living room run into the fireplace to form a stepped hearth (fig. 168). Asplund's furniture, a slightly disconcerting modern updating of a Victorian living room ensemble, complements the organic shape of the fireplace.

The two doors at the top of the living room stairs are yet another variation of Asplund's play with entrances. Detailed as ordinary interior doors, they look exactly the same, yet one leads outside to the terrace and the other to the dining room. One panel, painted light blue, on the door to the outside is the only clue that there is a difference.

In its siting in a benign cultivated landscape and in its use of a variation on the Swedish farmhouse vernacular, the house continues the national ideal for a country house defined so eloquently by Carl Larson at the turn of the century with his Lilla Hyttnäs at Sunborn. But the reassuring and idyllic bourgeois-bohemian world of Carl Larson has here been pervaded by a more complex sensibility.

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The Woodland Crematorium

The last project Asplund saw through to completion, by many considered his greatest, was the crematorium of 1935–1940 for the Woodland Cemetery, a project which grew out of the international competition he and Lewerentz won in 1915 (fig. 169). Initially the architects had planned to collaborate on its design, but the building committee eventually decided to give the job to Asplund only.[125]

If, however, the crematorium took shape from 1935 under Asplund's aegis alone, many of the crucial decisions which contributed to its final form were made earlier and involved the joint contributions of Asplund and Lewerentz. The evolution of these designs parallels the stylistic development of their architecture. In a plan dating from 1922–1923 the architects moved the chapel from its picturesque location at the crest of the ridge and placed it on a direct axis with the entrance in strict classical fashion.[126] The semicircular entrance to the cemetery grounds, designed by Lewerentz independently between 1920 and 1923, displays this clear neoclassical quality (fig. 169). Asplund's plan of 1924 for the burial grounds at Oxelösund, Roman in origin, clearly shows that he was thinking along similar lines (fig. 170).

The final molding of the landscape at the front of the cemetery and the final decision on the location of the main chapel[127] were represented in another joint plan of 1932. The main chapel was moved off axis to the eastern edge of the gently sloping plateau in front of the entrance. With the new proposal, the open landscape became the focus of the entrance axis.[128] The scheme represented a move from the rigid classicism of the twenties to a more naturalistic solution, with an International Style influence (figs. 171, 172). These

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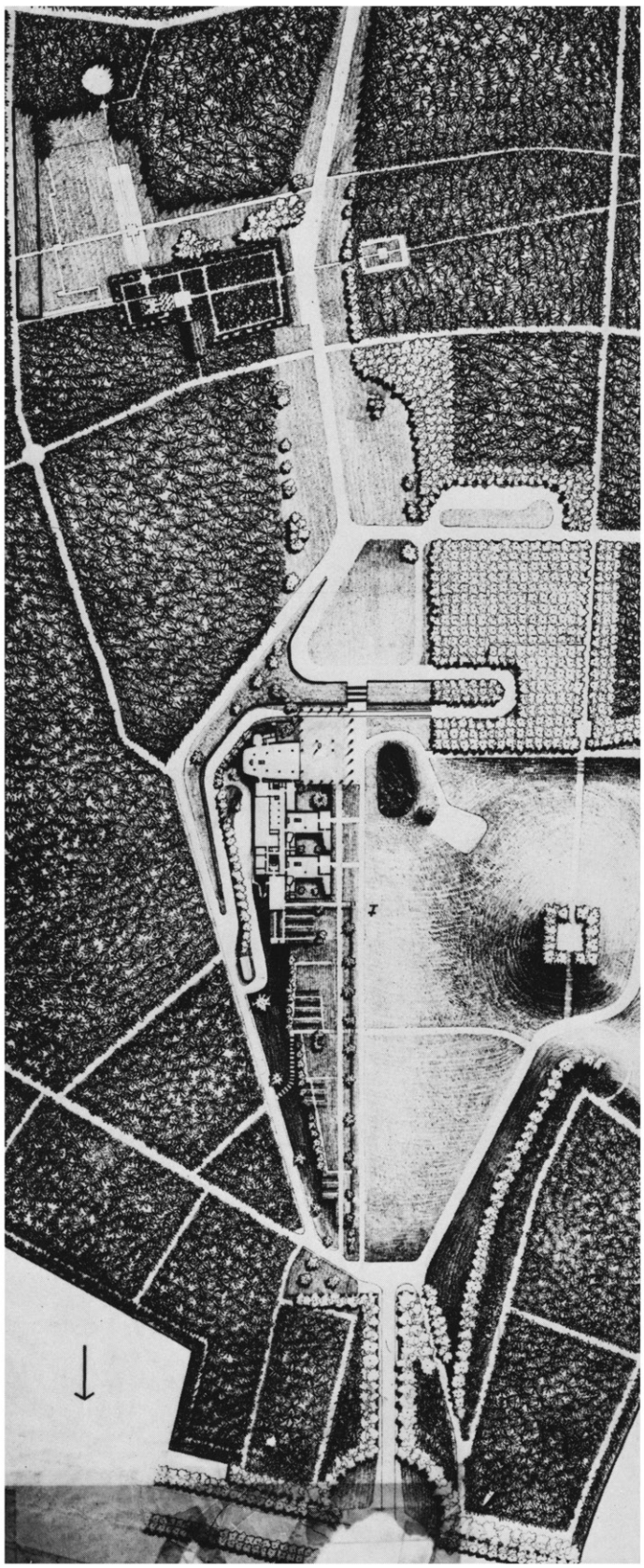

169. The Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, final site plan of front part of cemetery with crematorium, undated.

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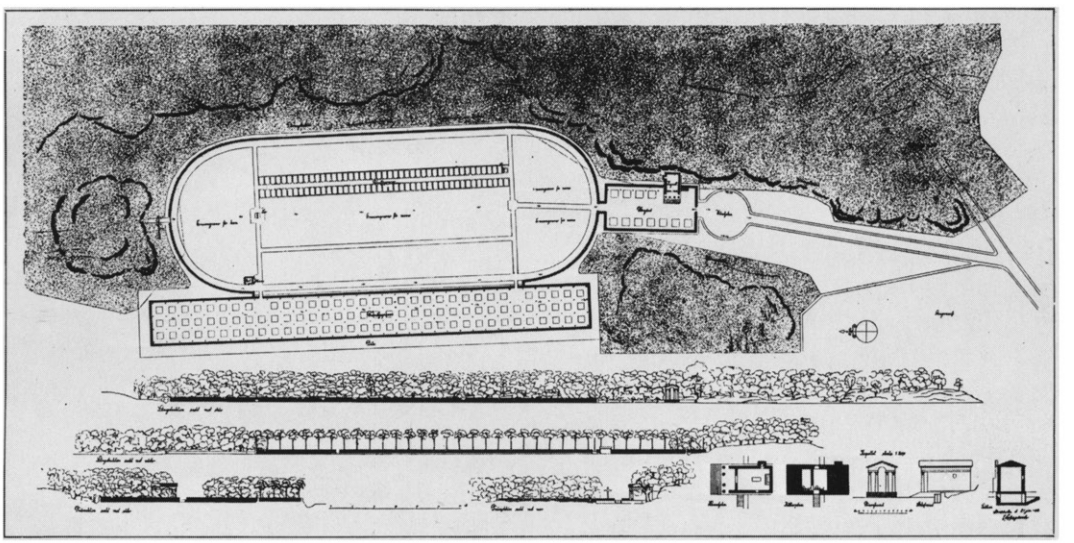

170. Oxelösund Cemetery, 1924–1929.

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gouache studies for a ceremonial plaza in front of the main chapel cultivate a very sensuous, minimalist landscape aesthetic. They are additional evidence of Asplund's role as a key pioneer in modern landscape architecture.

The architects had jointly prepared the groundwork for the new chapel. At the beginning of 1935 Asplund alone began the final designs for the building, which was now to be a crematorium. The program called for one big and two small chapels. The natural slope of the land led to the placement of service facilities one level below.

One of the first designs for the project, dating probably from the early part of 1935, shows the three chapels facing onto the landscape with deep, columned loggias in front of them (fig. 173). An undated perspective sketch[129] (fig. 174) is characterized by a timeless Mediterranean vernacular vocabulary that appears to have a fairly direct connection to Asplund's own simple classical project for the family vault of Prince Oscar Bernadotte of 1921. By November 1935 the plans were approved, in a form relatively close to the built version, though the main chapel, the loggia, and the articulation of the roofs were to undergo further study and changes.

Like the small Woodland Chapel, the crematorium subordinates itself to the dramatic landscape it is set in (fig. 175). Visually tied to the low wall that borders the footpath up the slope, it blends with the forest behind it and defines one edge of the open site. Seen from the entry to the cemetery, the strong directionality of the low wall is terminated by the static form of the great loggia at the crest. It is, however, the stone cross silhouetted against the sky and acting as a counterpoint to the

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wall which becomes the focal point of the composition.[130]

Asplund's use of essentially abstract walls as the organizing compositional element derives from traditional sources, yet there is a clear modernist-cubist influence in its implementation. The high, planar front walls of the small chapels serve to tie together the low mass of the waiting rooms in front of them. They also echo the freestanding walls, which serve as backdrops for graves further down the hill (figs. 176, 177). Contrasted to the planar composition of the front of the small chapels is the great centralizing and static form of the open loggia, its roof inverted toward the impluvium at its center[131] (figs. 178, 179, 180). The main facades are faced with an intricate pattern of unpolished white marble, while the building volumes attached to the back of these stone facades are clad in warm yellow stucco, giving the building an unusual lightness and intimacy.

The requirement of providing efficiently and sensitively for a large number of ceremonies every day posed special functional problems. Asplund designed the complex so that each chapel has its own forecourt, interior courtyard, and waiting room with direct access to the chapels. Thus two sets of mourners never cross paths; one enters the chapel from the waiting room after another has exited through the main doors.

The plan, with its mixture of free-form, skewed, and rectilinear walls, and its rich interpenetration of enclosed and open space, as well as its implied open endedness, displays a remarkable compositional freedom (figs. 181, 182). But the organization of courtyards off the oblique processional indicates that the plan relates to those of the Royal Chancellery project and the Stockholm Exhibition.

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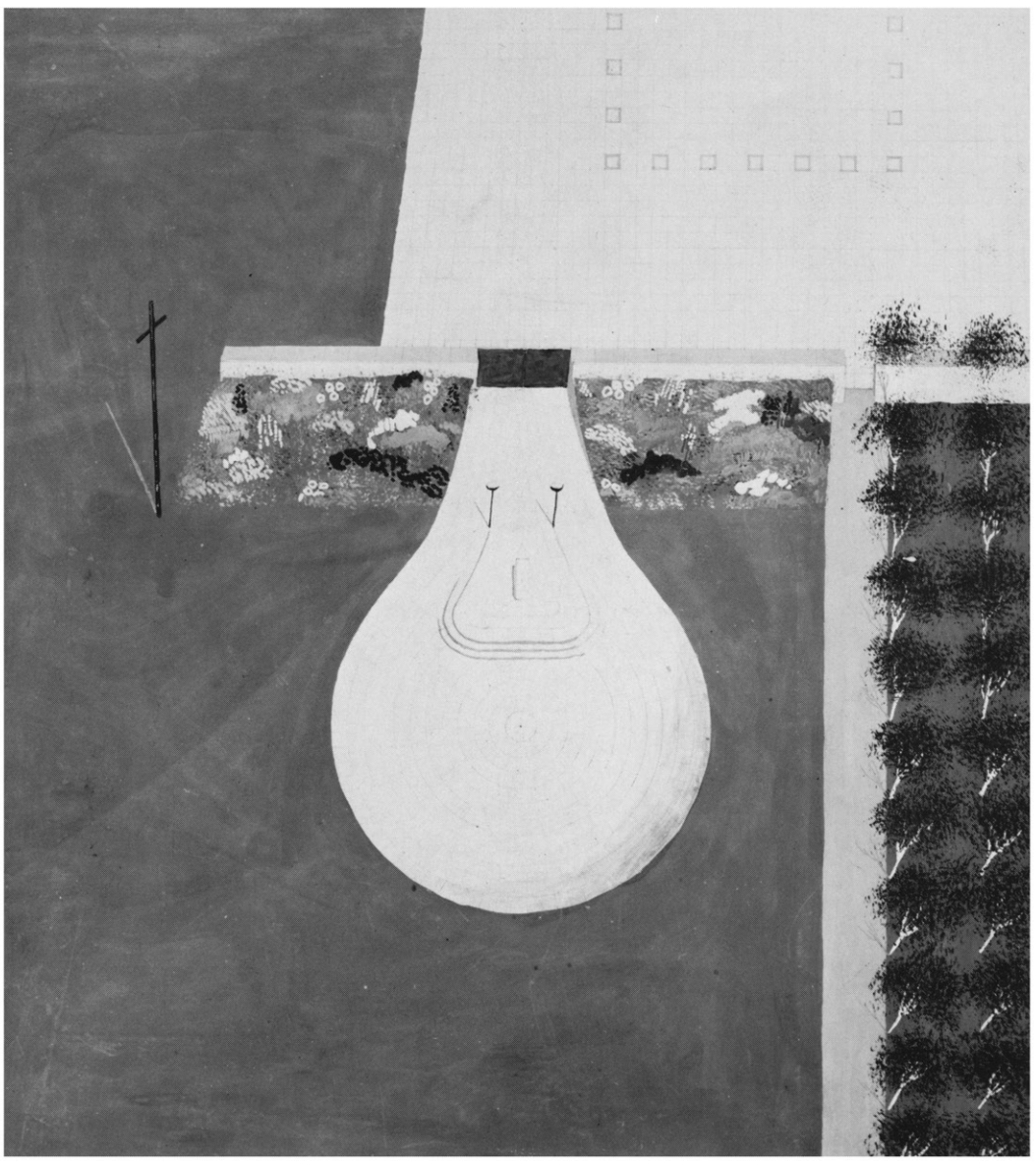
171. Woodland Cemetery, gouache, outdoor ceremonial plaza, 1932.



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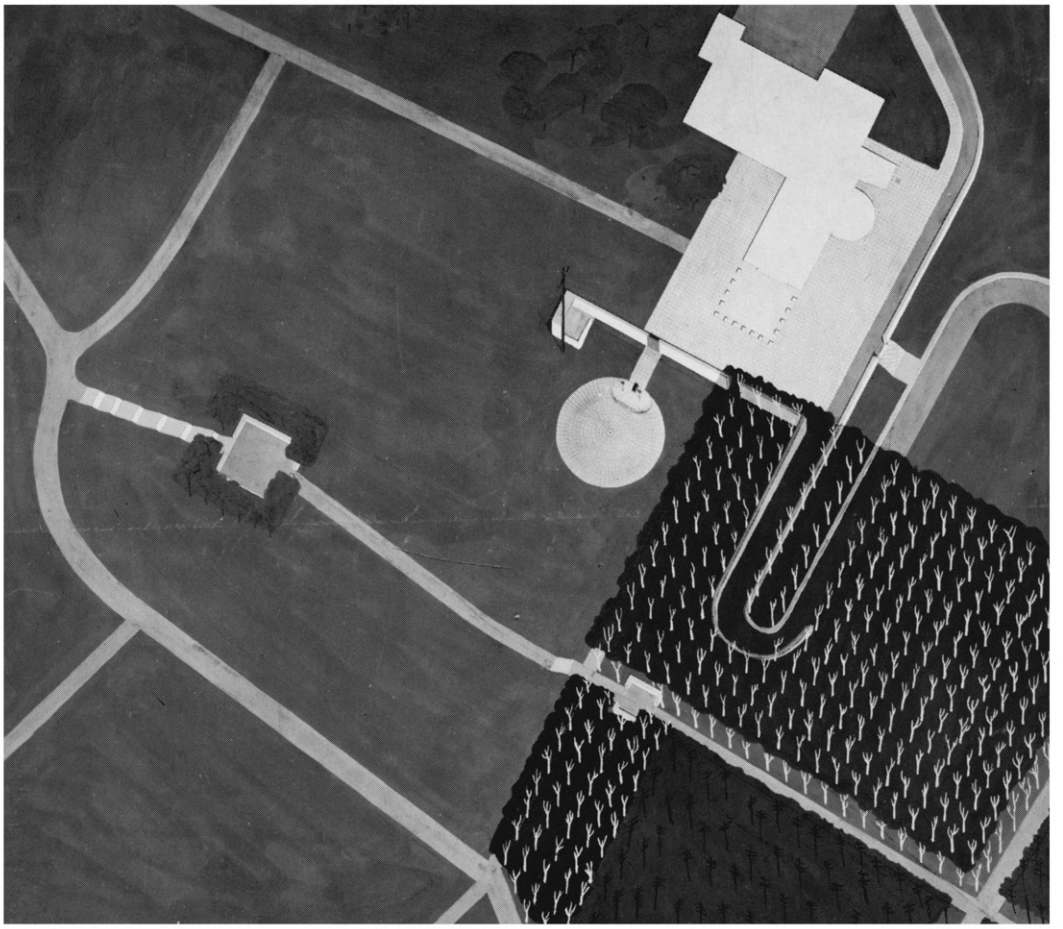

172. Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, gouache, chapel and landscape, 1932.

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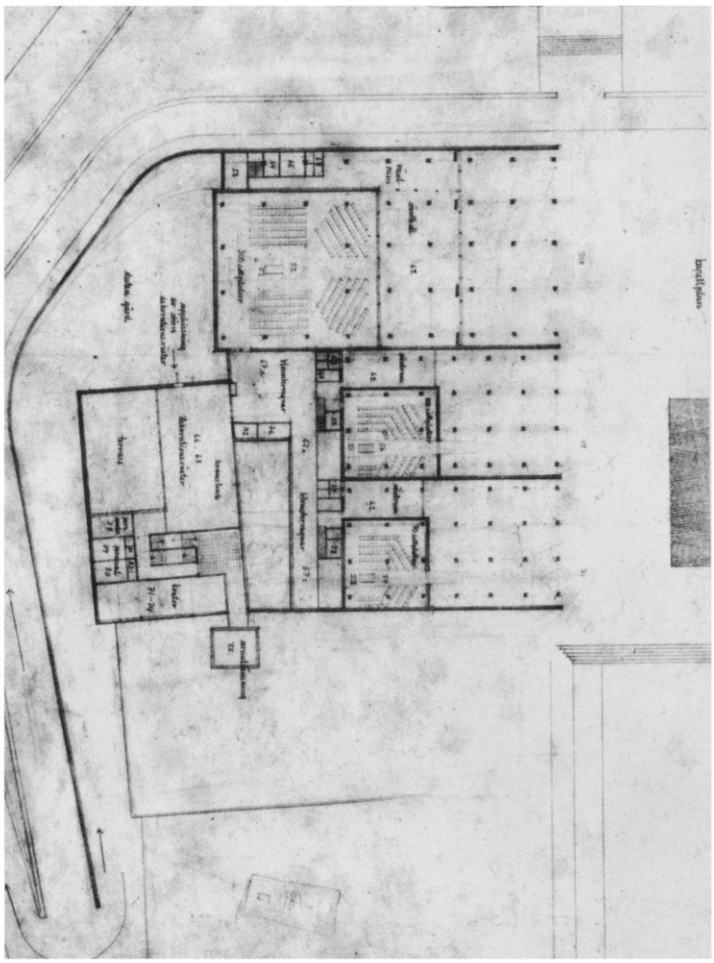
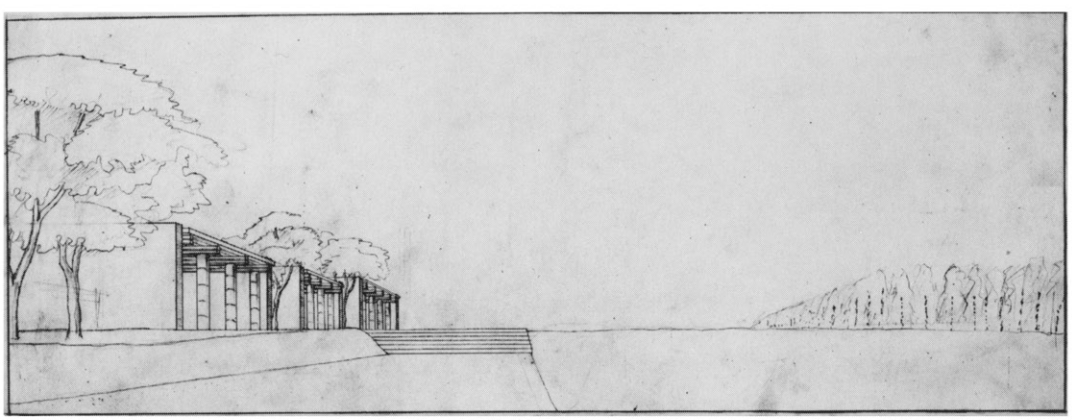


173. Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm, preliminary scheme, 1935, plan.

174. Woodland Crematorium, preliminary scheme, 1935, drawing, exterior perspective.



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175. Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm, 1935-1940, crematorium and landscape from entry to cemetery.

176. Woodland Crematorium.

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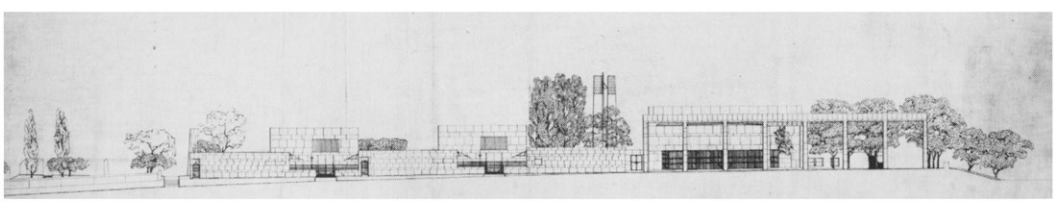

177. Woodland Crematorium, drawing, front facade.

178. Woodland Crematorium, the great loggia and two small chapels.

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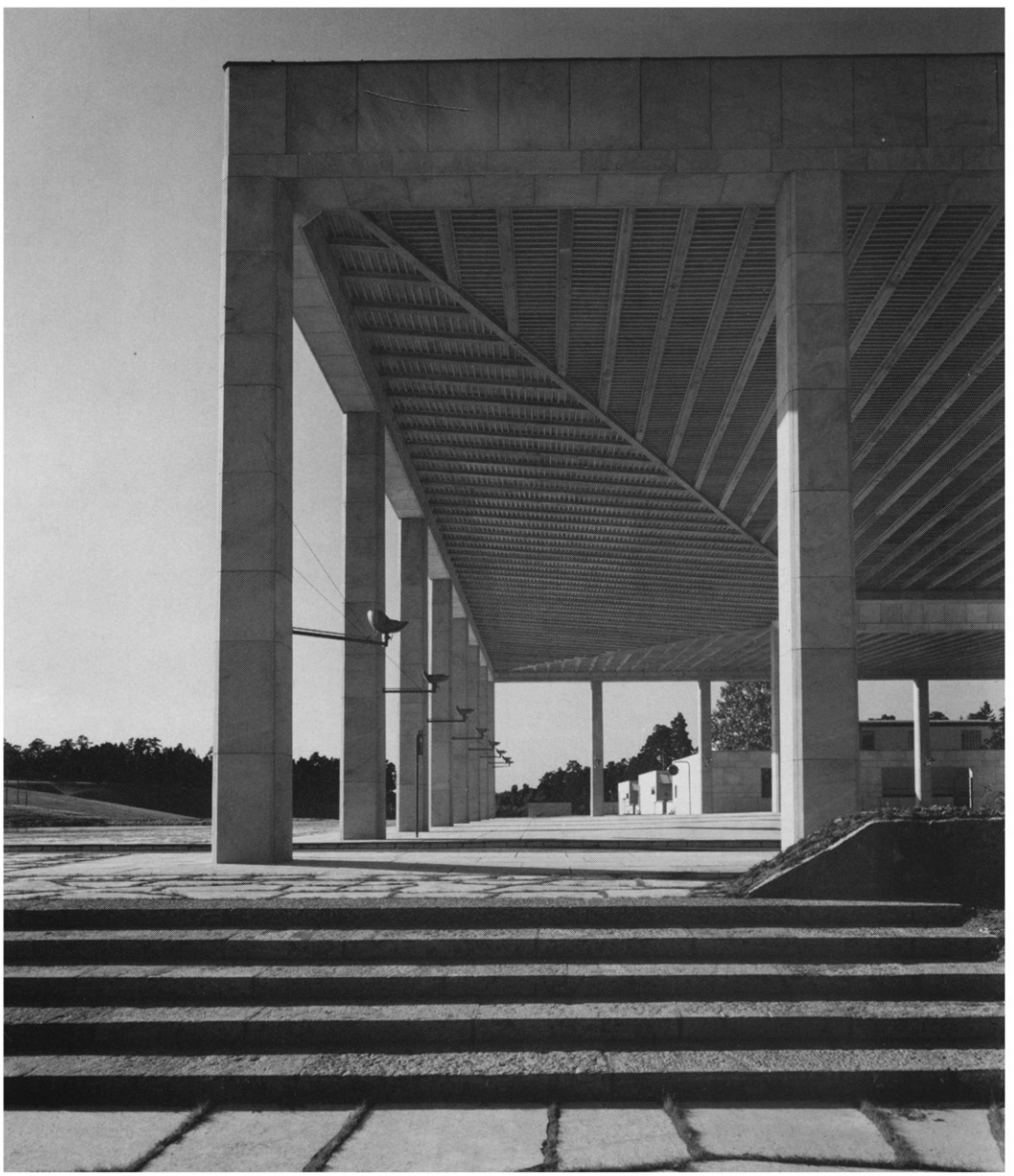
179. Woodland Crematorium, the great loggia.



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180. Woodland Crematorium, view from under the loggia toward the meditation grove on the knoll.

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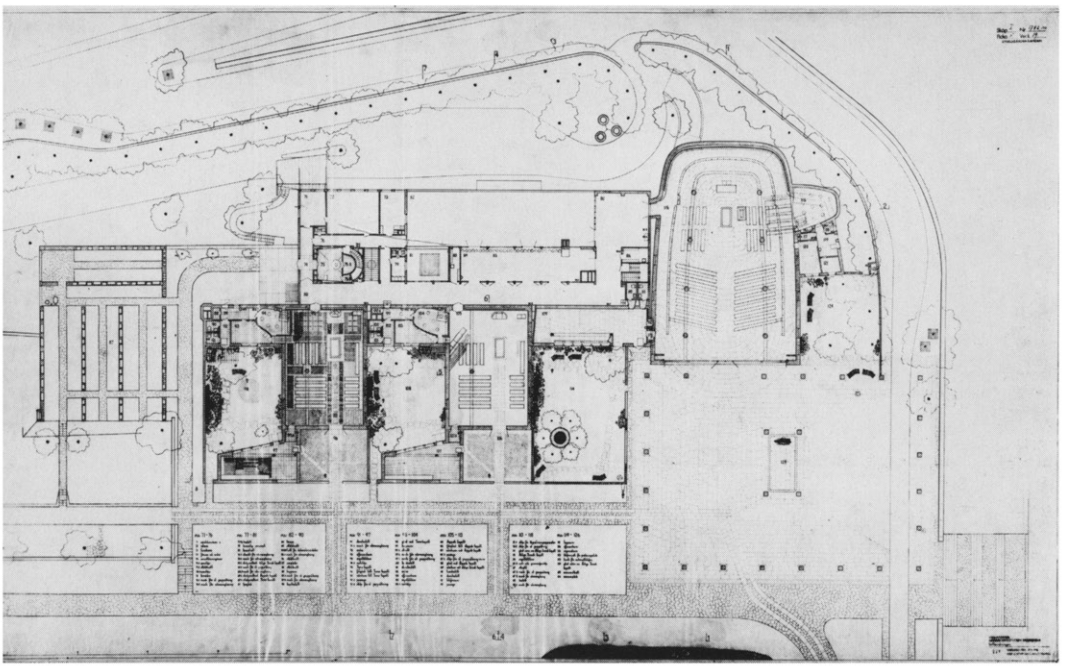
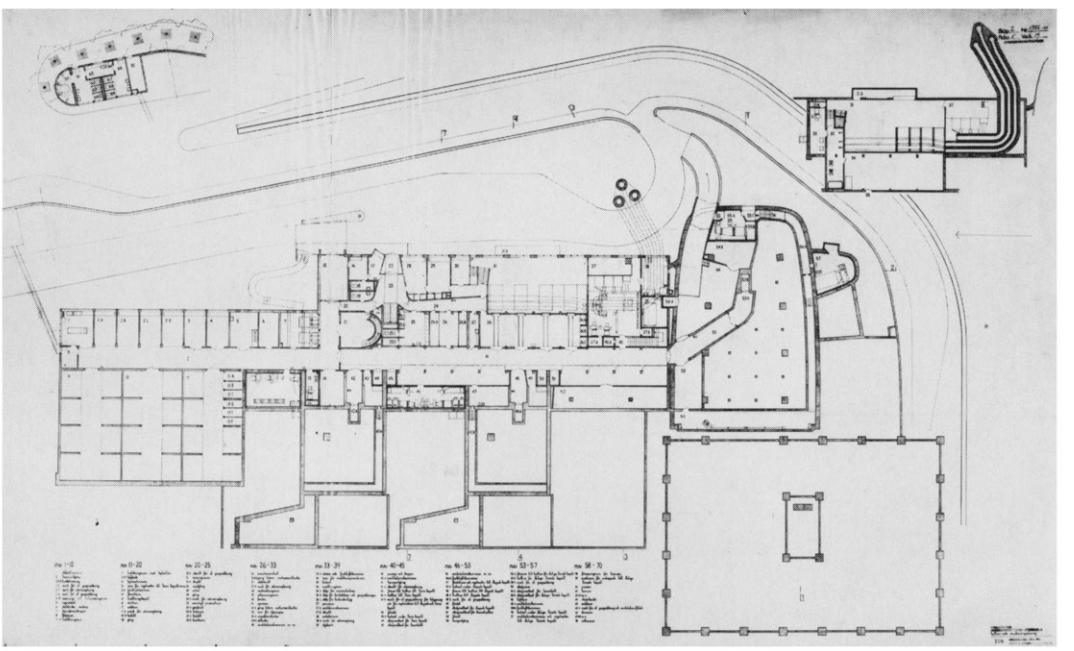
181. Woodland Crematorium, plan, main floor.

182. Woodland Crematorium, lower floor, plan.





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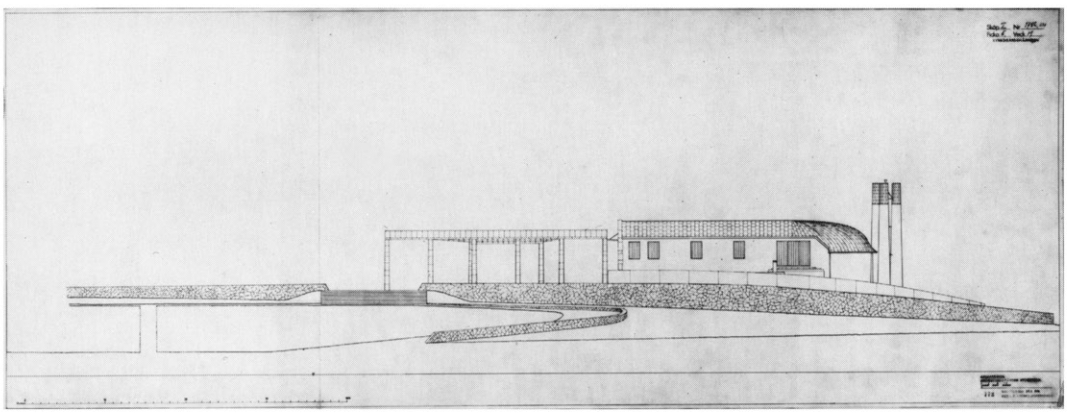
183. Woodland Crematorium, drawing, side elevation of loggia and main chapel.

184. Woodland Crematorium, main chapel, interior.



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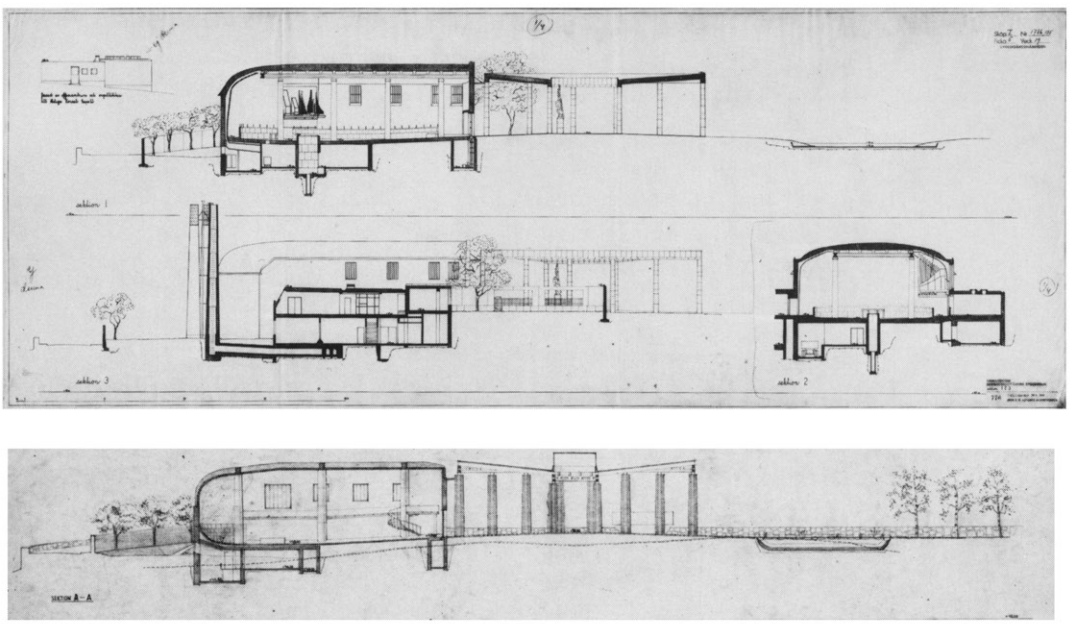

185. Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm, 1935–40, sections of main chapel.

186. Woodland Crematorium, main chapel, proposal of November 1935, section.

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Symbolically, the curving shape of the main chapel (figs. 181, 183, 184, 185), with its paving pattern radiating outward through the removable back wall, evokes both the burial cave[132] and the womb, an imagery appropriate to the cremation movement's symbolic coupling of death and rebirth.[133] An examination of the section through the chapel of the November 1935 scheme (fig. 186), with its floor curving up into the back wall,[134] perhaps better reveals Asplund's intention than the section of the final version.

Many details are equally symbolic: the "railroad station" clock, bent over as if with age (fig. 187),[135] and the lamps in the forecourts of the small chapels, in the form of candle snuffers (fig. 188). The entrances to the cremation ovens (fig. 189) echo the shapes of the caskets.

The great, grass-covered knoll with the tree-lined meditation grove at its top (figs. 190, 191), the dominant landscape element to anyone exiting from the chapels, resembles both the ancient burial mounds that dot northern Europe and a great earthen breast.[136] It is both the simplest and profoundest of images, one that in its archetypal nature brings us full circle to our beginnings.

The Kviberg and Skövde Crematoria

In addition to the projects discussed Asplund designed a few others in the late 1930s which he did not live to see into construction.[137] Among these were the crematoria for Kviberg and Skövde.

Asplund won first prize for the Kviberg Crematorium in a limited competition in 1936. Placed at the base of a steeply sloping site at the Kviberg Cemetery outside of Gothenburg, it was to be part of a larger cemetery design, the competition for which Asplund had won ten years earlier. The version that was finally built after

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Asplund's death differs in certain significant respects; this discussion is therefore illustrated by the project drawings and model of 1938.[138]

The main organizing element of the project is the powerful stone wall growing out of the slope of the hill, gently descending with one slight twist to fuse with the L-shaped building (fig. 192). Between the main wall and the steep slope of the hill are stepped terraces for the placement of urns and wreaths (fig. 193).

The building is gneiss and granite; the chapel windows, set into these massive walls, evoke ancient burial niches (fig. 195). The use of rough-textured stone both here and in the Skövde Crematorium was an important departure for Asplund, whose earlier buildings were usually clad with veneers of stone or stucco.[139]

The overall scheme of wall, chapel, and sloping landscape recalls Asplund's and Lewerentz's original winning scheme of 1915 for the main chapel at the Woodland Cemetery, where the Way of the Cross, ascending the hill, and the chapel formed a similar unified composition (fig. 197). At Kviberg, the wall, descending rather than ascending, has replaced the tree and sarcophagus lined promenade.

The Skövde Crematorium, designed in the years 1937–1940, was also built after Asplund's death. Though a smaller project with a less spectacular site, it continues the archaic theme developed at Kviberg with strongly articulated stone facades and small window openings[140] (figs. 198, 199). Because of similarities in size and shape a comparison with the Woodland Chapel of 1918 is instructive. The roof was the important element of the earlier building, but here the thick stone walls dominate, the roof being set in rather than allowed to overhang. Instead of the small interior dome carved from the volume defined by roof and ceiling, in

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187. Woodland Crematorium, clock and paving pattern.

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188. Woodland Crematorium, forecourt of one of small chapels.

189. Woodland Crematorium, doors to crematorium ovens.

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190. Woodland Crematorium, great cross with knoll and meditation grove in background.

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191. Woodland Cemetery, steps to meditation grove, by Sigurd Lewerentz.

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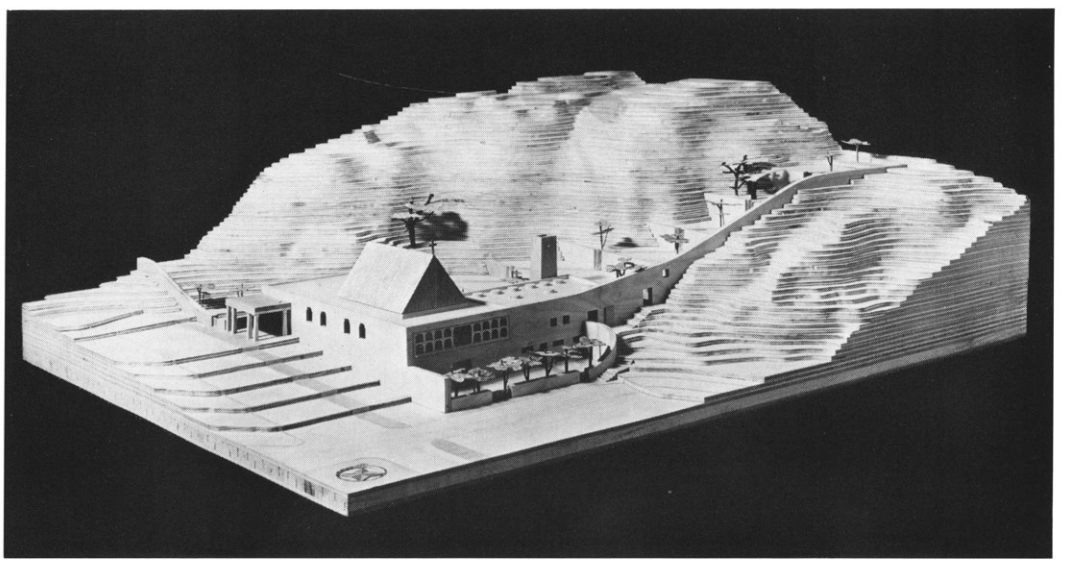

192. Kviberg Crematorium, Gothenburg, 1936-1940, project, model.

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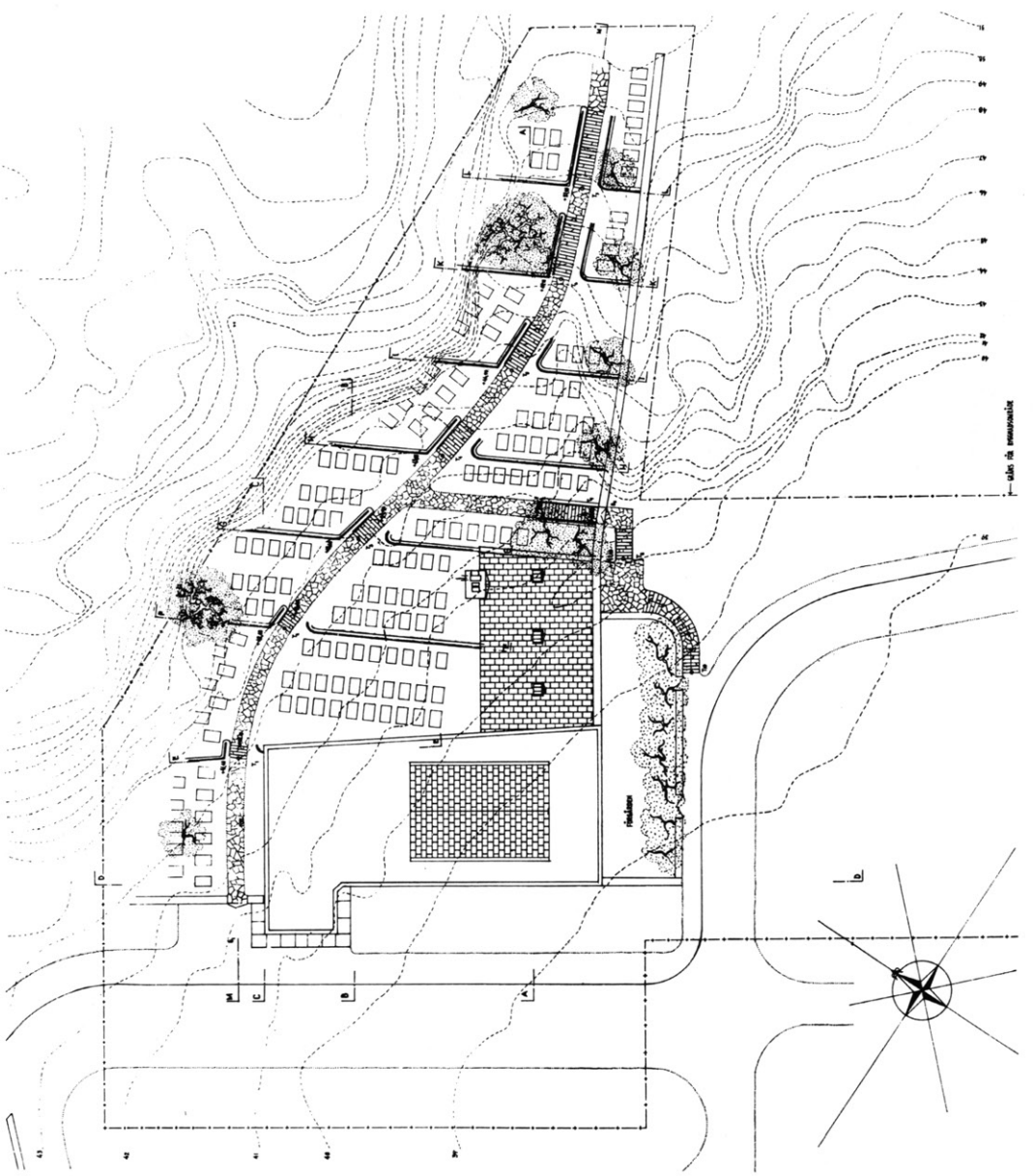
193. Kviberg Crematorium, site plan.



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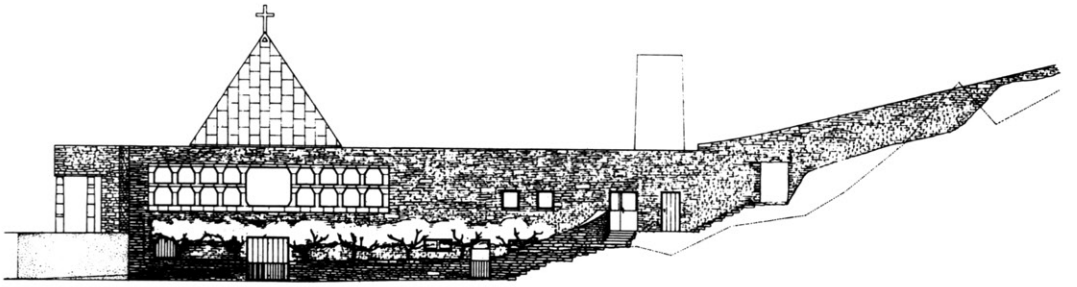

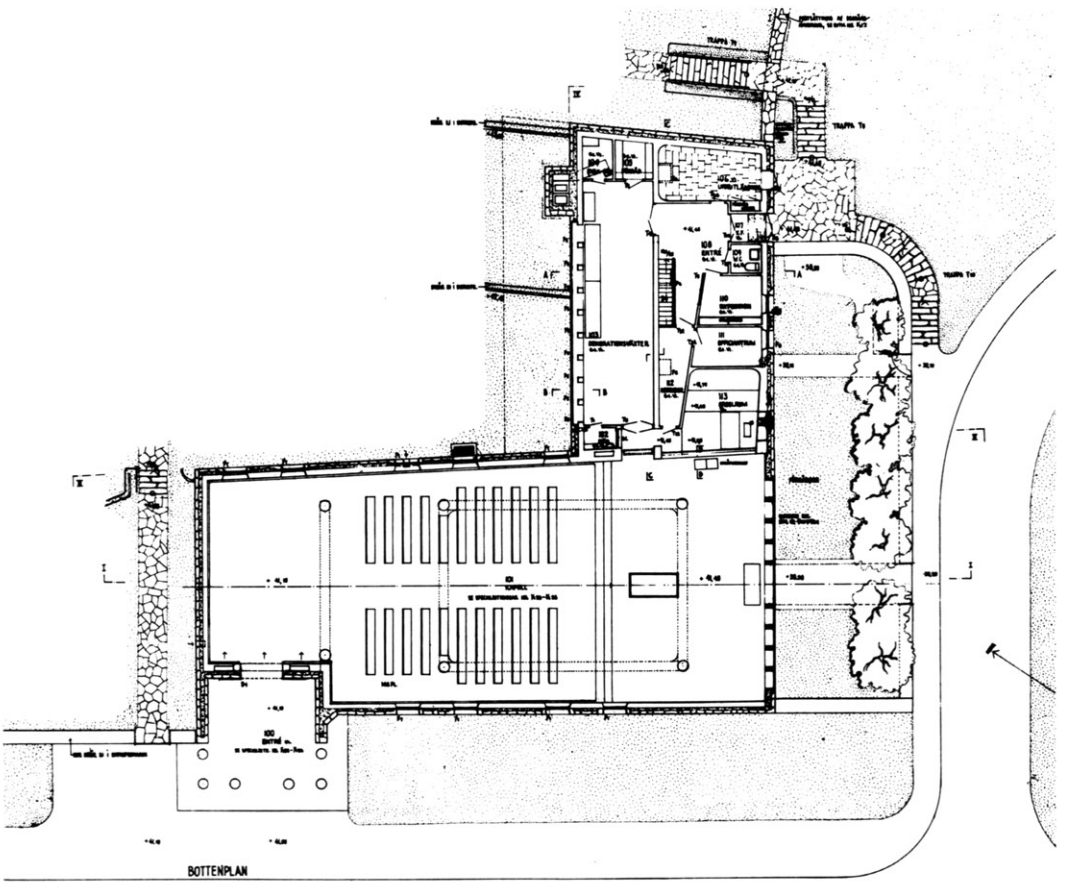

194. Kviberg Crematorium, elevation.

195. Kviberg Crematorium, plan.

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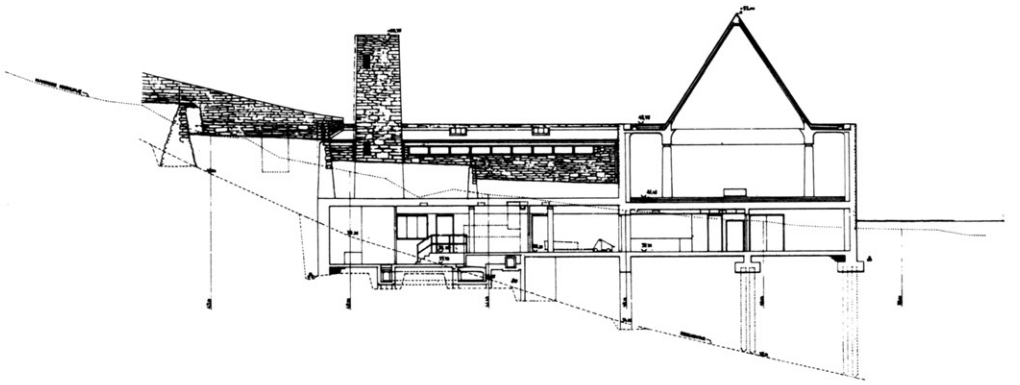

196. Kviberg Crematorium, section.

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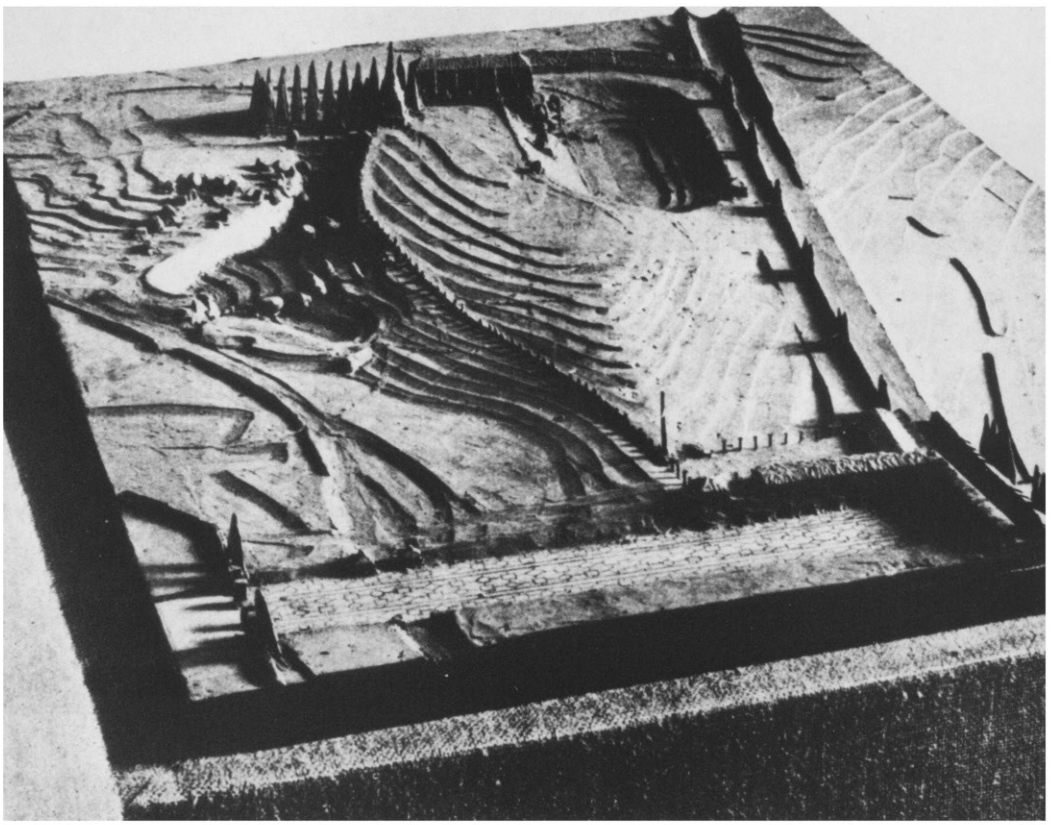

197. Competition entry, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, 1915, model of front part of cemetery with main chapel.

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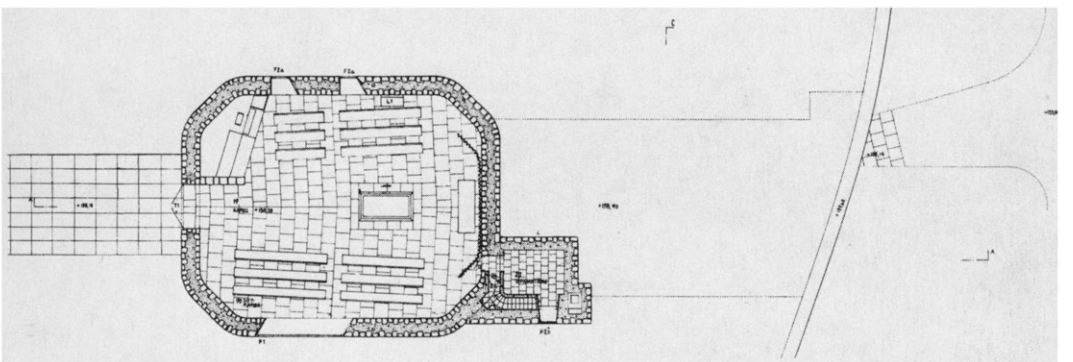

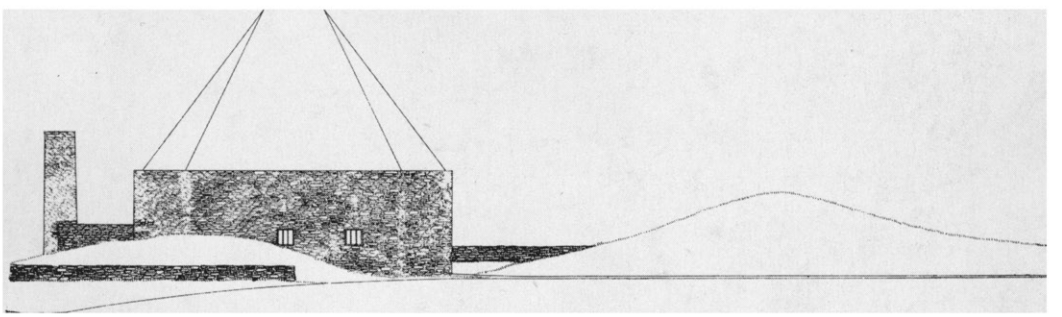

198. Skövde Crematorium, Skövde, 1937–1940, plan.

199. Skövde Crematorium, elevation.

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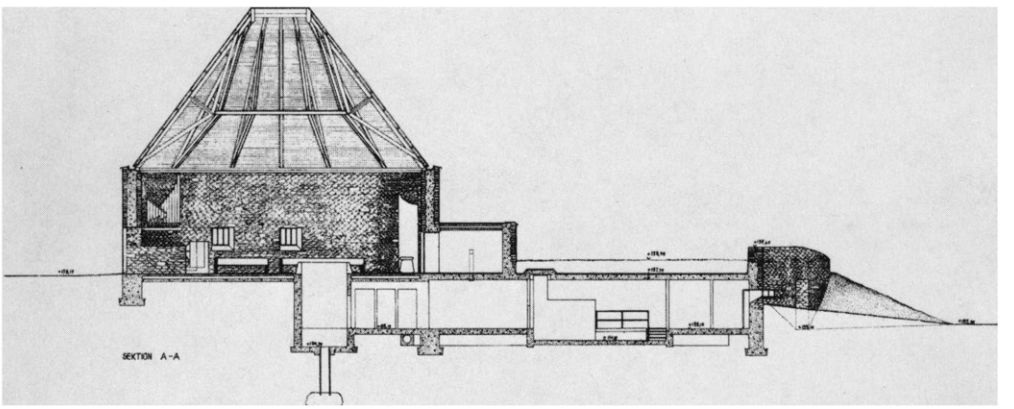

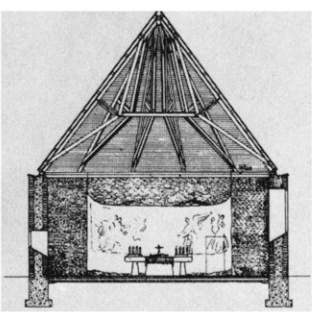

200. Skövde Crematorium, section.

201. Skövde Crematorium, cross section.

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the crematorium the inside ceiling has been dispensed with, exposing the whole space within, with its carefully composed roof trusses of wood,[141] to the chapel below (figs. 200, 201). The source of light at the Woodland chapel was the skylight at the top of the dome, creating a light dome and a dimly lit space below; at Skövde the lower area is lit and the steep pyramidal space dark.

Project for the Social Welfare Offices, Stockholm

In 1938 Asplund won first prize in a limited competition for the Social Welfare Offices, a large building complex to be located on a triangular site at the edge of Klara Bay, within view of the Stockholm City Hall at its mouth.

The winning proposal, later modified (fig. 202), consisted of a five-story office wing along Piper Street, against which was set a tall, square tower with chamfered corners, at a skew vis-à-vis the low office wing but with one side parallel to the shore.

The two buildings were connected by a low wing containing the main lobby, whose front curved to accommodate the main driveway coming in from Fleming Street. Along Fleming Street the bay had been extended into the site, creating a small peninsula on which the tower stands.

Asplund has used the directional force of the driveway to mold the building, implying that the curved entry is a response to the force of the driveway and that the tower has been pushed into its skewed position by it, to the point where a dynamic balance has been achieved. Keeping in mind that at the time Swedes drove on the left-hand side of the road, an additional force is suggested. As the implied directional force of the cars is deflected by the curved entrance wing, a corner of the tower has been dislodged and pushed partly out into the landscape.

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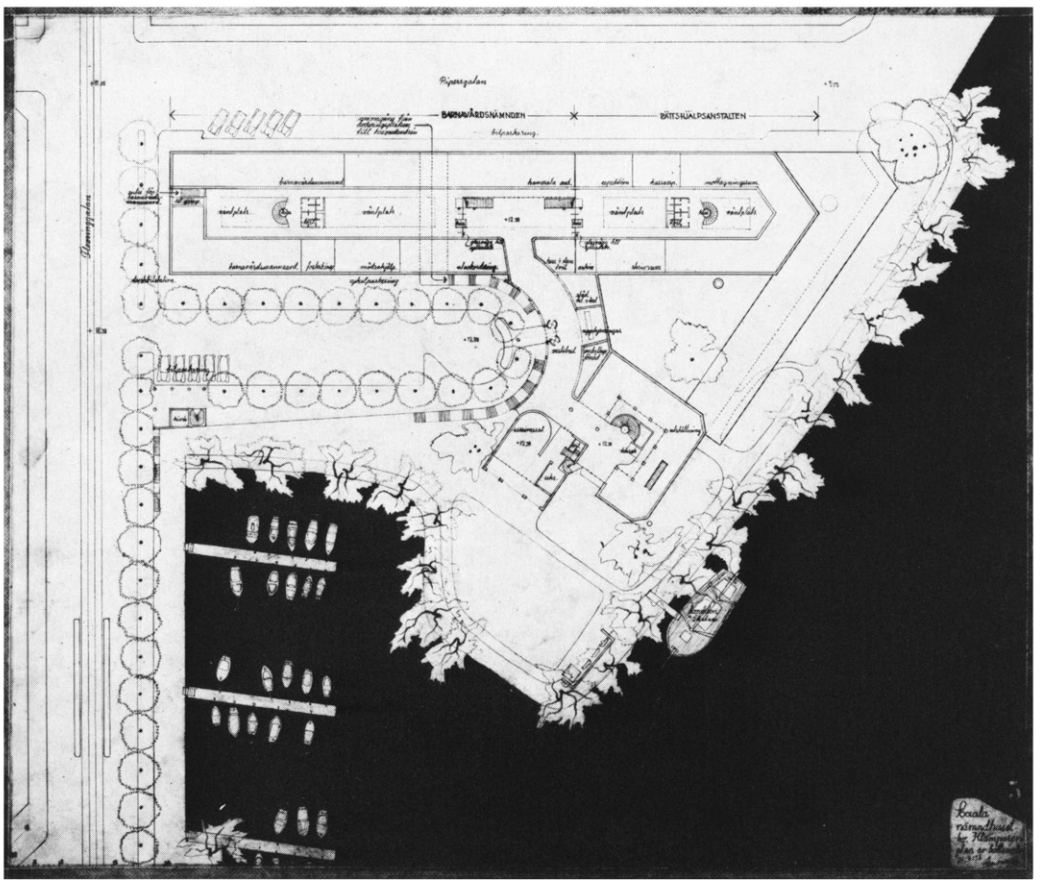

202. Competition entry,
Social Welfare Offices,
Stockholm, 1938, plan.

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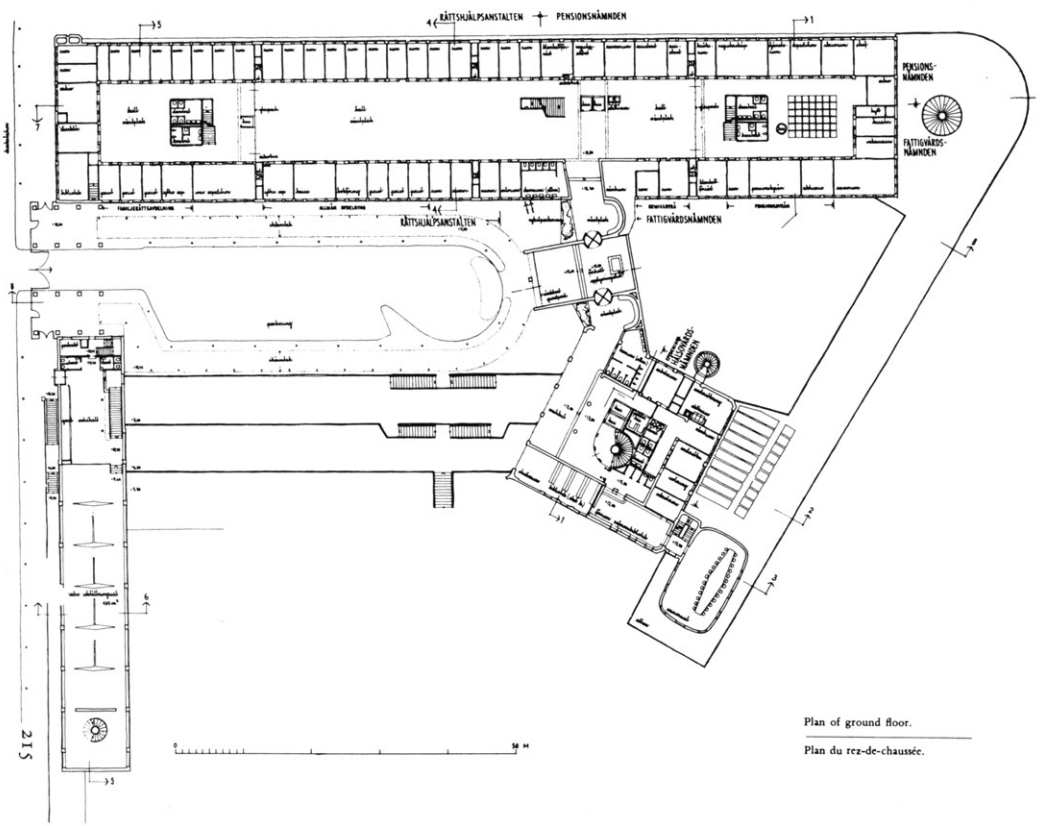
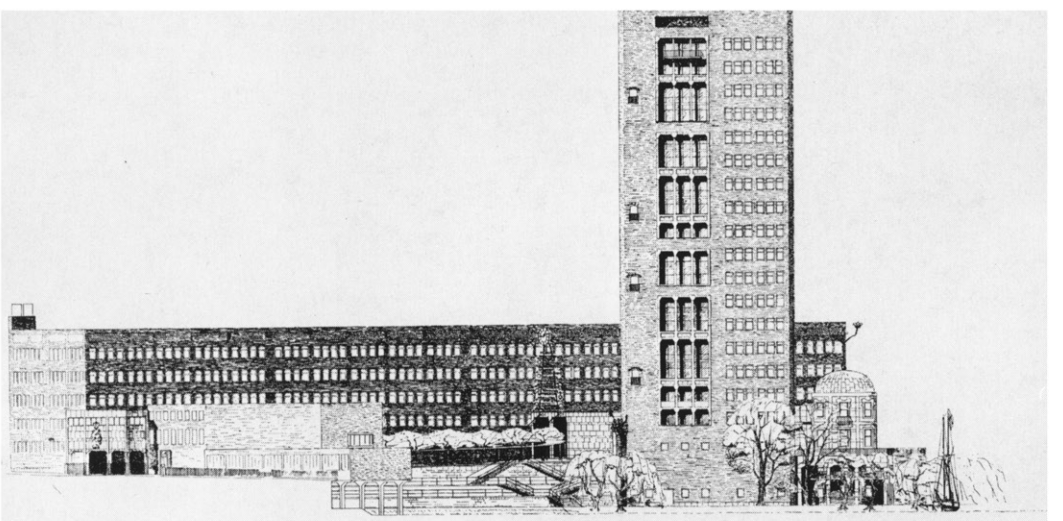
203. Project, Social Welfare Offices, Stockholm, 1939, ground floor plan.

204. Project, Social Welfare Offices, Stockholm, 1939, elevation toward water.



Plan of ground floor.

Plan du rez-de-chaussée.



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In the later, more developed scheme this initial play of forces was to become much more muted (fig. 203). The curve of the entrance wing disappeared, and Asplund developed a low wing along Fleming Street, under which the driveway was brought through a colonnade. This low wing served to create a more intimate, enclosed courtyard space, elegantly terraced and focused on the water and the city hall in the distance.

In designing the complex, Asplund had Östberg's city hall very much in mind. He wanted his building to complement it and thus used the same type of brick (fig. 204). The skew of the tower vis-à-vis the long office wing, though at a very different scale, recalls the two small skewed towers of the interior courtyard of the city hall.[142] If the scheme as it developed took on a more refined and eclectic tone, with new decorative details such as the almost baroque pavilion at the base of the tower to house a two-story meeting room, it was no doubt because Asplund felt a strong responsibility, not just to Östberg's building, but to the whole of Stockholm's beautiful architectural past, which lined the bays and canals of the central city. The sense of permanence and continuity was of key importance to him in this project. Unfortunately it was never built.

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Conclusions

From the reports of colleagues and former employees Asplund was a man obsessed with architecture, who drove himself and his small staff, which never numbered more than five, to the limit.[143] Two o'clock in the morning was not an uncommon time to find him still at work, and his employees often faithfully stayed as long. Work was never late, and competitions were always finished a few days before they were due.[144] This punctuality, among other reasons, earned him excellent relations with his clients.

Asplund maintained rigorous control over every aspect of a project, which no doubt accounts for the extreme richness of his detailing and for the unity of conception in his buildings, where plan and details complement each other to create stronger motifs.[145] Despite an apparent facility, the creative process appears to have been a slow and arduous one for Asplund, no doubt partly because of the extremely high goals he set for himself. One gets a sense of this struggle from the rich selection of sketches that have been preserved from a few of his projects. Designs often began with the obvious and only gradually evolved after reams of sketches into the richly subtle solutions we know.[146]

Though Asplund's architecture evolved through a number of stylistic phases, there is a clear continuity of motifs and themes, both formal and symbolic, from the early work to the late. Underlying almost all of Asplund's work is a duality which initially grew out of the pairing of the medieval and the classical but soon developed into a broader synthesis with symbolic overtones. Thus the pairing of the organic with the geometric, the cylinder with the square, the Egyptian with the classical came to symbolize more cosmic dualities of man–nature, reason–spirit, male–female, and finally, life–death.

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Asplund's fascinating talent for combining formal and psychological essences of different architectures enabled him not only to evoke these dualities but also to give his buildings a wide emotional range. Paralleling this phemomenon was his ability to conceive his architecture in terms of analogies to man, nature, and natural processes. As Alvar Aalto perceptively noted in 1940, "Much can be written about Asplund's art and its different phases, but if one studies them one will always find this underlying direct contact with nature."[147] These analogies, to growth, to birth, and to the body were orchestrated to add levels of meaning to his buildings. Unlike other architects who conceived their buildings in terms of organic forms, such as Gaudi, Häring, and even Aalto (who essentially came to that approach through Asplund) Asplund's work cultivates a restrained minimalism which subtly heightens the effect of each gesture and contributes to the metaphysical dimension of his buildings.

Asplund's career defies easy categorization, particularly any attempt to see a linear progression from early work to late. Though by international standards he was a latecomer to the Modern Movement, his earlier work participates in that evolutionary process of renewal of traditional architecture that started in Scandinavia with the advent of National Romanticism and in many respects anticipates the formal concerns of the Modern Movement. Yet the jump from the Stockholm Public Library to the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 was vast both stylistically and culturally. But Asplund was to be one of the very first architects who, having embraced functionalism, reacted against it. From the mid-1930s onward, he began to reintegrate modern architecture with classical-vernacular and archaic sources. But

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though his work of this period clearly broke with the International Style and the tenets of functionalism, it was to remain modernist. Thus the temptation to see Asplund's Stockholm Exhibition and other projects of the early 1930s as aberrations should be resisted. Not only were they to inform his subsequent work, but, viewed in terms of his concern with significance, they are a perfectly logical sequence in his career. Rather one may view Asplund's career as tracing a spiral, where earlier motifs are constantly returned to but in a new context, while other elements continually are transformed. His architecture offers a remarkable study in continuity and change.

Hakon Ahlberg, Asplund's friend and colleague, wrote of him:

> His character, though well-balanced and harmonious, was made up of many seemingly conflicting elements. There was an element of softness, of sentimental romanticism, of regard for detail, of airy blossoming. There was another element of daring and boyish impulsiveness. A third was characterized by a craving for the truth, clarity, absolute genuineness, self-criticism. The fourth displayed restless seeking, combativeness and self-assertion.[148]

Asplund's concern with the symbolic and psychological betrays a more complex personality than Ahlberg captures in his description. But this must have been a hidden side, as Asplund never discussed meaning or symbolism in his work with clients, employees, colleagues, artist friends, or even his wife. When he wrote about his work in *Byggmästaren,* he limited himself to discussing functional, practical, and, once in a while, formal problems.[149] Like most modern architects, Asplund would give a functional justification for what he

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had done: the shape of the main chapel at the Woodland Crematorium was determined by acoustical considerations, the organic courtrooms in Gothenburg by requirements of lighting.

But, as has been established, Asplund's architecture has strong emotional resonances that play on memories, moods, and associations. His work displays a nineteenth-century concern with significance and symbolism, and yet there is a difference. Traditional symbolism was clearly defined and carried through with a conscious intellectual consistency, but Asplund's is often elusive and ambiguous. It appears to be highly intuitive, based on deeply felt and freely mixed associations, and in many cases there is little evidence that it was conscious, except for the consistency of certain motifs. Yet the overt use of symbolism in his early work as well as his subtle and sophisticated use of forms, would argue against the theory that it was an unintentional aspect of his architecture. Rather, his work appears to have followed a course which closely parallels developments in modern literature and psychology, with their interest in archetypes, dreams, and the unconscious.

If Asplund's symbolism stands in contrast to the certainty of nineteenth-century constructs, the emotional range of his work is equally at odds with the one-dimensional technocratic optimism of the Modern Movement. Thus Asplund appears to define an alternate modernist tradition, one with roots in the past as well as in the modern psyche, with its complex range of emotional needs.

In his short "In Memoriam" for Asplund of 1940,[150] Aalto showed that of all his contemporaries he had the profoundest understanding of Asplund's work when he

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wrote: "Sweden—but above all, architecture—has suffered a great loss. The first among architects, who in a wider sense has been both pioneer and pathfinder for his own era's living architecture, has left us," and he concluded:

The motifs of a large proportion of our conventional architecture are still fragments of a bygone era. Another architecture has arrived which builds for man and essentially regards people as a social phenomenon, while at the same time taking science and research as the point of departure. But beyond that a newer architecture has made its appearance, one that continues to employ the tools of the social sciences, but also includes the study of psychological problems—"the unknown human"—in his totality. The latter has proved that the art of architecture continues to have inexhaustable resources and means which flow directly from nature and the inexplicable reactions of human emotions. Within this latter architecture, Asplund has his place.

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Notes

Preface

1
Bruno Zevi, *Erik Gunnar Asplund* (Milan: Il Balcone, 1948); also Eric de Mare, *Gunnar Asplund: A Great Modern Architect* (London: Art and Technics, 1955).

2
Gunnar Asplund, Architect, 1885–1940, ed. Gustave Holmdahl, Sven Ivar Lind, and Kjell Ödeen, with an essay by Hakon Ahlberg (Stockholm: AB Tidskriften Byggmästaren, 1950; first published in Sweden in 1943).

3
The interest in Asplund in Hungary and other eastern European countries appears to date back to the time of Stalin, when modern architecture was effectively discouraged. Asplund provided the more progressive architects with an example that combined traditionalism and modernism.

4
Although he is essentially unknown to his profession in the United States, one suspects that his influence in this country has been much greater than his obscurity would indicate. Leading practitioners and theorists in both the United States and England have been, to one degree or another, familiar with his work. But I would like to suggest that Asplund's main influence on architecture in America has come about indirectly, through the work of Eero Saarinen (who was in Finland in the 1930s) and Alvar Aalto. They drew on very different aspects of Asplund's work. Saarinen's form making, his use of different vocabularies for different projects, had antecedents in Asplund's search for significance and exerted its greatest influence in the 1950s and early 1960s. (Bruce Adams, an associate of Eero Saarinen from 1950 to 1955, recalls that Saarinen spoke with admiration of Asplund's work and often mentioned the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex specifically.) Aalto's adoption of many of the motifs of Asplund's method of plan organization was to reach the United States in the middle 1960s and to have an increasing following from this date onward.

5
Uno Åhren, "Reflexioner i Statsbiblioteket" (Reflections while in the Public Library), *Byggmästaren,* 1928, p. 93.

6
Although their work displays major differences on the level of meaning, they shared a reductionist aesthetic, a love of fine materials, and the influence of Biedermeier.

7
In addition to stylistic and formal motifs I have focused on the symbolic dimension of Asplund's work, a dimension of which I was unaware at the beginning of the project and which only gradually revealed itself as following a remarkable pattern. Although some of my interpretations are speculative (since there is minimal written corroboration from Asplund) the very consistency with which his projects invite metaphoric readings constitutes the strongest support for my thesis. My attempt to discuss meaning and metaphor in his work does not represent an effort to psychoanalyze Asplund, but aims to consider meaning in relationship to the building in question. However, Asplund's rather personal and unorthodox figurative constructs do invite speculation about his attitudes and intent.

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8
Also needed is a more thorough study of Asplund's influence on other architects, mainly in Scandinavia but also elsewhere. Here Asplund's influence on Aalto's post–World War II work, never previously analyzed to my knowledge, deserves particular attention.

Chapter 1

9
There are two versions of this story, the first told by Asplund in his article "Konst och Teknik" (Art and technology; *Byggmästaren,* 1936), according to which his teacher discouraged him because he thought Asplund did not draw well enough. Ahlberg emphasizes the older Asplund's worries about his son's livelihood.

10
Clason was particularly against the widely used neo-Renaissance stucco facades which expressed neither the materials (usually brick) of which the building was constructed nor its structure.

11
Both Östberg and Westman went to the United States in 1893. Östberg returned to Sweden after traveling and seeing the World's Columbian Exposition; Westman stayed on to work for a few years. They were both to be strongly influenced by architectural developments in America, particularly the work of H. H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan, and by the shingle style in general. The evolution and major work of this movement are well documented in Hakon Ahlberg, *Modern Swedish Architecture,* ed. F. R. Yerbury (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), and in August Hahr, *Architecture in Sweden* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1938).

12
Ivar Tengbom, younger than Östberg and Westman, started as a National Romantic architect, but his best-known buildings, like the Stockholm Concert Hall, are in the classical style. Carl Bergsten was more internationally oriented than the other three and is perhaps best known for Liljevalch's Art Gallery of 1916.

13
Eric Lundberg, *Svensk Bostad* (Swedish dwelling; Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1942).

14
But one senses that Östberg must have been somewhat embarrassed about the articulation of this bold design feature in the otherwise proper facade and thus treated it as a semiround bay.

15
Noted by Elias Cornell in his book *Ragnar Östberg, Svensk Arkitekt* (Stockholm: Byggmästarens Förlag, 1965).

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16
As Henry-Russell Hitchcock noted in his article "Aalto vs. Aalto: The Other Finland," *Perspecta* 9/10, The Yale Architectural Journal (1965), Nyrop's town hall also influenced Saarinen's design for the National Museum in Helsinki.

17
Eric Lundberg's analysis of the K. O. Bonnier villa was purely in relationship to developments in housing. Elias Cornell, in his book on Ragnar Östberg, discusses the interior skewed walls of the villas and the building masses of the town hall but gives them little emphasis. To my knowledge there has been no comprehensive analysis of the development of these motifs in Swedish architecture, let alone of their eventual influence on Aalto.

18
The other students included Osvald Almqvist, Erik Karlstrand, Josef Östlin, Sigurd Lewerentz, and M. Wernstedt.

19
This motif may have found its most dramatic expression in the balcony wing of the Paimio Sanatorium by Alvar Aalto.

Chapter 2

20
Stanford Anderson, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany, 1900–1917," doctoral dissertation, photocopy, Columbia University, 1968, pp. 133–136.

21
Staffan Björk, *Heidenstam och Sekelskiftes Sverige* (Heidenstam and turn-of-the-century Sweden; Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1946).

22
Quoted in ibid.

23
For a thorough discussion of the Northern Romantic tradition in painting, see Robert Rosenblum's *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

24
Provoked by the ongoing restoration of Uppsala Cathedral and Gripsholm Castle, Heidenstam published two articles in the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* entitled "Modärn Barbarisn" and "Gripsholm som Forminne" (Gripsholm as a historic relic) that set forth his view of current restoration practices. For an excellent discussion of the architectural debate preceding the emergence of National Romanticism, see Ulf G. Johnsson's "Mot en Ny Stil—Svensk Arkitekturdebatt omkring 1900" (Toward a new style: Swedish architectural debate around 1900) in *Sju Uppsatser i Svensk Arkitektur Historia* (Uppsala: Ars Suetica, 1970).

25
Gotthard Johansson, "Stadshuset och 90talet" (Stockholm City Hall and the 1890s), *Dagens Nyheter,* 1923 (day and month unknown).

26
According to Hakon Ahlberg, Strindberg was popular among the younger generation of architects at this time, and his second wife, Ingrid Hindmarsch, reports that Asplund kept returning to the work of this writer, whom he much admired, even in the 1930s, when he had little time for reading. (Letters to the author.)

27
Asplund would, however, probably have been aware of the work of artists such as Böcklin and Klinger, whose enigmatic paintings had strong surreal overtones and would inspire de Chirico, Ernst, and others.

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28
E. G. Asplund, "Några Anteckningar om ett Modärnt Tyskt Fasadmaterial" (Notes on a modern German facade material), *Teknisk Tidskrift A,* 1911.

29
Hakon Ahlberg gives a lengthy account of Asplund's trip to Italy: see *Gunnar Asplund, Architect.*

30
Asplund Archive, Swedish Architecture Museum, Stockholm.

31
Lars Israel Wahlman, another leading architect of the National Romantic style, whose most famous building was perhaps the Engelbrecht Church in Stockholm (1907-1913).

32
I am indebted to Bengt Johansson's excellent unpublished essay, "Skogskyrksgården i Enskede, 1914-1940" (The Woodland Cemetery in Enskede, 1914-1940), 1961, for many of the facts concerning the planning of the cemetery and its evolution.

33
Ulf G. Johnsson, "De Första Svenska Krematorierna och Deras Förutsättningar" (The first Swedish crematoria and the conditions under which they emerged), *Konst Historisk Tidskrift,* vol. 15 (1964), p. 117.

34
Ibid.

35
As mentioned earlier the architects would however have known of and been influenced by the Swedish landscape painters of the 1890s who had close affinities to Friedrich. On another level Friedrich's dilemma as discussed by Robert Rosenblum, his need to revitalize the experience of divinity in a secular world outside the sacred confines of traditional Christian iconography, which had exhausted itself, had parallels to the problems faced by the more sensitive architects at the turn of the century: the exhaustion of meaning in the traditional styles.

36
Ibid.

37
Though the building, with its layered wall planes, is classical and would, as an element in the landscape, more obviously invite a comparison to Poussin, the fact that it is approached obliquely and from below rather than frontally makes a significant difference in how the composition is experienced. The processional up past the great cross toward the loggia at the crest of the slope with the sky as a background is of an intensity that takes on symbolic meaning. Viewing the buildings head on from the grass-covered knoll is a totally different experience, which brings Poussin, with his frontally layered landscapes, more readily to mind.

38
A comparison of Asplund's chapel and Lewerentz's (designed in 1922) is instructive. Though both architects had moved strongly in a classical direction since their winning competition, Asplund succeeded in retaining, even intensifying, the romantic spirit of the winning entry. Lewerentz, on the other hand, produced a simple and beautifully detailed but cold classical chapel which stands apart from, rather than being integrated into, the landscape.

39
Bengt Johansson, "Skogskyrkogården i Enskede."

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40
Aage Rafn et al., *Boken om Liselund* (The Liselund Book; Copenhagen, 1918).

41
Arkitektur, 1919. Hytten in turn may have been inspired by Sebastiano Serlio's published design for a house for a peasant.

42
However, it is interesting that on the page with the picture of Hytten in the Liselund Book is a picture of a half-buried earth vault.

43
For another excellent analysis of the building see Michael Graves, "The Swedish Connection," *Journal of Architectural Education,* September 1975. Asplund's ability to transform this layout into a composition similar to cubist collage leads one to speculate on the picturesque townscape, particularly the roofscapes of medieval villages, which was a popular motif for Cézanne, Braque, and Picasso, as a possible source for cubism.

44
However, these developments did not necessarily entail a more successful three-dimensional massing of the building.

45
The corridor and rotunda together tend to figure as an independent element within the rectangular plan, the bedrooms becoming a residual space between them and the exterior contour.

46
In writing about the building in *Byggmästaren* Asplund speaks of the private nature of the entry court, as well as of the evening sun it captures. This made it a pleasant place for the family to sit. Today it is in fact used both as the entry and garden side of the house; with increasingly informal life styles, such a mixed use is common today, whereas in 1918 it would have been rather unusual.

47
There is a Magrittian quality to the juxtaposition of the doors, although the villa antedates Magritte's work by a number of years.

48
But it did receive a lengthy and laudatory review in *Byggmästaren* the same year from Gustave Strengell, the Finnish architect and theoretician.

49
The same picture had appeared earlier in the *Deutsche Werkbund Jahrbuch,* which may be where Paulsson found it.

50
Gunnar Asplund in *Byggmästaren,* 1918.

51
Thus the grain warehouse for Eskiltuna, with its narrow classical tower, was to exercise an enormous influence on apartment building designs, particularly in Finland.

52
August Strindberg, *Plays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

53
These appear more clearly in a drawing of a slight variation of the scheme not pictured here.

54
One explanation could be that Asplund's wife gave birth to their first child in June 1920, probably about the time plans and details for the building were being finalized. Asplund, who was becoming increasingly involved with metaphors of man and nature in his work, could easily have become obsessed with the richly organic images of pregnancy.

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55
Here it should be noted that a detailing in which windows were set flush with the facade was also quite common in Sweden in the late eighteenth century.

56
Gunnar Asplund, "Aktuella Arkitektoniska Faror för Stockholm, Hyreshusen" (Present-day architectural dangers for Stockholm: Apartment buildings), *Byggmästaren,* 1916.

57
Charming as are these facades (and the later ones for Gustaf Adolf Square), they are in fact quickly sketched pastiches. Thus they are not included here. It appears that Asplund usually did not give serious thought to the facades until a building was ready to be built. As Ahlberg pointed out in *Modern Swedish Architecture,* the plan was his first concern. Moreover, although classical columns and pilasters appeared in a number of his preliminary facade sketches for projects, they were almost always eliminated in the built version.

58
Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect.*

59
Ryberg had been one of the winners of the Göta Square competition.

60
The choices of passages and entries creates an almost labyrinthian feeling that leaves the arriving visitor unsure of which route to follow, perhaps an appropriate commentary on an anonymous modern bureaucracy.

61
Colin Rowe and Frederick Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

Chapter 3

62
Paul Mebes's book *Um 1800* came out in 1908 and soon became a standard text not just in Germany but in Scandinavia.

63
The writings of the Danish art historian Vilhelm Wansher were actually more important to the classical revival.

64
Carl Petersen became professor at the Academy (architecture school) in Copenhagen, where he exercised considerable influence on students, including Aage Rafn and Kay Fisker. Rafn, while still a student, was the moving force behind the Liselund book, which, according to Steen Eiler Rasmussen was partly a polemic against Nyrop. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978.) Both Bentsen and Thomsen were also to become professors at the Academy.

65
Kay Fisker worked for Asplund and Lewerentz in the summer of 1916.

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66
Thus Lewerentz's 1914 proposal for a crematorium in Hälsingborg was the basis for the main chapel in their joint competition entry. Lewerentz in turn later borrowed motifs from Asplund. Asplund also admired Lewerentz as a landscapist and no doubt learned a good deal from him in this area; and Lewerentz acquired an extensive architectural library, from which Asplund often borrowed. But, judging from their later work, it is hard not to conclude that the strong romantic naturalism and pathos of their winning scheme originated with Asplund. According to Hakon Ahlberg, who knew both architects well, Asplund was quick and intuitive, Lewerentz more systematic. But of their colleagues, they stood closest to one another in a shared sensibility. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978.)

67
Gunnar Asplund, "Skandiateatern i Stockholm" (The Skandia Cinema in Stockholm), *Byggmästaren,* 1924, p. 185.

68
In his diaries, quoted in Hakon Ahlberg's essay, Asplund describes a real festival in Taormina during his Italian trip.

69
In an interesting essay on Asplund entitled "'Himlen som ett Valv'—Om Asplunds Rums Gestaltning" ("The sky as a vault"—on Asplund's spatial conceptions), *Arkitektur,* no. 5 (1961), p. 93, Elias Cornell traces the occurrence of this metaphor in Asplund's oeuvre.

70
Gunnar Asplund, "Skandiateatern i Stockholm."

71
Ibid.

72
Thus the partly open curtain may be seen as a metaphor for both the gates of Paradise and sexual fulfillment.

73
Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," in *Sketches,* ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

74
The jury, while acknowledging its originality, doubted that the small scale and the tightness of the site would allow for the desired effects. For instance, the frontal perspective would never be seen as such because of the screen of trees between it and the viewer.

75
However, the pavilion is also quite logical in terms of Asplund's own previous production, such as the Woodland Chapel, where the pyramidal roof appears to be supported by all the columns when seen from the front.

76
Each of these details may call up other associations as well. The point to stress is that each one invites a symbolic reading and, when taken together, the readings appear consistent.

77
Boullée's library project, which must also have inspired Asplund, could, given its rectangular shape, hardly be interpreted as a metaphor for the mind.

78
The fact that the back side of the square is not joined flush with the other wings,

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thus breaking the otherwise perfect form, is perhaps problematic in terms of a symbolic reading. Yet seen from the sides and the front the building gives the impression of being perfectly square. One senses that Asplund had to resolve a conflict between his desire for a perfect square and his wish to give the building a front and a back.

79
Stanford Anderson, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany, 1900-1917."

80
Where the corridors to the reading rooms break through the bookcases, Asplund has detailed the corridor wall as the fine cover of a giant book that also serves as bookend for the bookshelves. The detailing, carried out in wood veneers and brass inlay, clearly refers to a gilt-embossed leather cover.

81
This room seems invariably to trigger a warm response in Scandinavians, who immediately remember the fantasy world of their childhood, but it is often judged by English and American critics as sentimental and kitschy, perhaps simply a case of cultural differences.

Chapter 4

82
Uno Åhren, "Pa Väg not en Arkitektur," (Toward a new architecture), *Byggmästaren,* 1926, p. 133.

83
Uno Åhren, "Reflexioner i Stadsbiblioteket."

84
"New classicism" (*ny klassicism*) is the Swedish term for Scandinavian twentieth-century classicism. What Åhren did not perceive in those heady days of early functionalism was that, although the Stockholm Public Library was a product of haut bourgeois culture, it transcended its milieu and has continued to exercise a powerful imaginative impact because of its timeless formal rigor and its strong psychological and symbolic dimension. If Asplund's library clothed itself in the monumental vocabulary of the traditional ruling classes it had in other respects little or nothing to do with haute bourgeois pretensions. Rather it may be said to represent the displacement from within of the materialism of bourgeois culture in favor of the spiritual and metaphysical.

85
As he phrased it, "Here it is a question of intellectual Sweden's grasp on the average Swede—a sympathetic and understanding grasp which aims at removing his luxury appendix, an operation that the average Finn also needs." Alvar Aalto, "The Stockholm Exhibition I," *Sketches.*

86
According to Sven Ivar Lind, on first being shown some pictures in 1926 of Le Corbusier's houses by Kruger, the contractor for the Stockholm Public Library, Asplund had been startled. "Imagine designing houses with horizontal strip windows!" he had exclaimed. Yet it seems unlikely that Kruger would have come upon Le Corbusier before Asplund. Rather, one suspects that, in the manner of the *grand maître,* Asplund was professing ignorance of the other's work.

87
According to Hakon Ahlberg, Asplund felt that he had been used by Gregor Paulsson and that Paulsson's vision was somewhat limited. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978). Exactly when Asplund developed these sentiments is unclear. But judging by his early enthusiastic espousal of the

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modernist vision in his lecture, "Our Architectural Concept of Space" (1931), they probably developed after the Exhibition was over, perhaps even some years afterward.

88
In the same essay he answers the point, often brought up, that Aalto's and Bryggman's 700th anniversary exhibition in Turku occurred a year earlier than the Stockholm Exhibition. "To draw the conclusion that the Finns this time were in advance of the Swedes is, to put it mildly, an exaggeration." Nils Erik Wikberg, "Om Arkitektur" (About architecture) in *Försök over Arkitektur,* (Efforts in architecture) a collection of his essays (Helsinki: Söderstrom & Co., 1963).

89
Gregor Paulsson, *Upplevt* (Autobiography; Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1974).

90
Ibid.

91
Ibid.

92
If Paulsson's version is correct, Asplund at first hesitated about the new style. Thus, perhaps Paulsson's persuasiveness was of key importance, or his account is subtly meant to give that impression. We know that Asplund's International Style base for the library was published in June 1928 and thus predates any officially presented projects for the exhibition. Asplund may have felt that despite Paulsson's modernist enthusiasm he had to tread carefully in dealing with a conservative board of directors, to lead them on gradually toward a more modernist solution.

93
It must be kept in mind that the complex of buildings was both temporary and, of course, an exhibition, and as such not really a direct model of a city. But as it spoke to the interests of a new, middle-class, urban society, its spatial organization was at the very least symbolically important. A year later, in his inaugural speech as professor at the Technical High School, he was to take a more orthodox modernist line (see note 78). And in a chapter on the city published in the polemical booklet *Acceptera* (Accept) a year after the exhibition as a kind of followup by Paulsson, Asplund, and a group of other architects involved in the exhibition, the city's destruction was not proposed. But new developments must be allowed to happen within the traditional city if it is to remain a vital and functioning organism, they insisted.

94
Alvar Aalto, "Stockholm Exhibition I," *Sketches.*

95
Noted by, among others, Bruno Zevi, in his book *Erik Gunnar Asplund.*

96
This did not prevent an angry uproar over the architecture of the exhibition from various sources.

97
That Asplund chose not to design one of the dwellings in the housing section has often been cited as proof that he did not share the social concerns of the Modern Movement, that to him modernism was just another style for pursuing his formal preoccupations. To his contemporaries housing was the architect's primary concern. Subsequent developments would indicate that perhaps after all Asplund had a larger perspective on the issue.

98
The exhibition's influence on examples of postwar

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Swedish urbanism, such as Vällingby center or Hötorget in Stockholm, would be worthy of a study; unfortunately these projects lack the high and consistent level of architectural quality of the exhibition.

99
Joints were caulked only where leaks appeared.

100
Gunnar Asplund, "Stockholmsutstalningen 1930" (The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930), *Byggmästaren,* special issue, 1930, p. 132.

101
Beyond the restaurant was the housing exhibition, with dwellings by various architects, including Åhren and Markelius, designed to strict budgetary standards.

102
In 1931 Asplund was appointed professor of architecture at the Technical High School in Stockholm. The speech he gave at his installation, entitled "Vår Arkitektoniska Rumsuppfattning" (Our architectonic concept of space; *Byggmästaren,* 1931) took as its point of departure Oswald Spengler's analysis of the underlying spatial conceptions of various cultures throughout history from his *Decline of the West,* published in 1922. According to Spengler, the endless room represented the Western conception of space (which originated around 1000 A.D.) and was most clearly manifest in the Gothic and the baroque. Taking this as a point of departure, Asplund postulated in the development of modern architecture and town planning the dissolution of space (Ger. *Raum*), both interior and exterior (the square and the street). (Spengler's book came out before the revolutionary effects of the Modern Movement were clearly apparent.) Strongly influenced at this point by the thinking of Le Corbusier and various German town planners, Asplund discussed approvingly German open "lamel" housing developments and Le Corbusier's Voisin plan, though he perceptively pointed out that it would have required a dictatorship to realize the latter. He said:

Our era's architectural signature is the dissolution of architectural space. . . .
Town planning and architecture have spent much energy and knowledge in maintaining our old spatial ideals despite all the enormous pressure in the form of unanticipated flow of people to the cities, social changes, and the rapid growth of traffic. . . .

Under the pressure of reality people are now beginning all over the world to turn away from the traditional conception [of enclosing space], as it works against the solution of real problems, and are beginning to arrive at the principle of dissolved space, a principle which is natural for our era's real situation and behind which we seem to discern new formal architectural values. . . .

According to this conception, architectural space attempts, in other words, not to enclose itself as an architecturally defined and independent entity, but to open itself up for sun, nature, human life, and movement.

The dissolution and the transformability of space, the opening up of the building mass, the intimate connection between outside and inside all seem to indicate to me that our architectural conception of space is approaching the Spenglerian archetype: the endless space. . . .

It is not a degeneration but a regeneration.

The speech is evidence of Asplund's genuine, if temporary, conversion to the doctrines of the Modern Movement.

103
In its distortion of the ideal as a gesture to view and water, the project anticipates some of the work of Sert, Sterling, and Venturi, among others.

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104
In addition to the one plan there are a diagrammatic plan and legend explaining the spaces as well as a few drawings of skylighting details.

105
The same motif of square interlocked into the side of a larger square, as well as the spiral circulation system which ends in a rising counter spiral, occurs in Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall, though organized in a clearer and more concise manner.

106
Analyzed from the point of view of its detailing and its influence on Scandinavian architecture the building could probably command a lengthy essay. As this is not the thrust of my book I have preferred to discuss similar detailing in the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex, where it takes on additional layers of meaning.

Chapter 5

107
Two of the finest of these projects are Sigurd Lewerentz's Government Insurance Building in Stockholm and Sven Markelius's Concert Hall in Hälsingborg.

108
Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect.*

109
But the functionalist polemic which Åhren had introduced in 1926 in Sweden had its counterpart in Denmark in the journal *Kritisk Revy* (1926–1928), edited by Paul Henningsen, the designer. It was widely read in Scandinavia by, among others, Alvar Aalto, who also contributed an article to it on the technical aspects of cinema design.

110
The Kviberg Crematorium represented perhaps too radical a break with modernism to have become an acceptable model for emulation. However, the exposed roof trusses of the Skövde Crematorium were quickly to become a standard Scandinavian motif.

111
Ture Ryberg's entry to the town hall and law courts competiton for Halmstad in 1936.

112
According to Asplund's second wife, Ingrid Hindmarsh, Alvar Aalto was in Stockholm almost once a month during this time, 1934–1940 and would always drop by the Asplund office, which was in the same building as their apartment, to discuss ideas and projects with Asplund.

113
Alvar Aalto, "Rationalism and Man," *Sketches.*

114
Gunnar Asplund, "Konst och Teknik" (Art and technology), *Byggmästaren,* 1936.

115
According to Hans Asplund, who is in possession of his father's lecture notes from the Technical High School, Gunnar Asplund continued to teach the functionalist creed to his students even after he himself had clearly gone beyond it in his own work. Torvald Akerson, who had Asplund as a professor in 1934 and later worked for him, was also struck by the discrepancy between his teaching and his practice.

116
As Asplund never wrote a word about his use of symbolic associations in this building this remains a conjecture on my part.

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117
Björn Fredlund, "E. G. Asplund's Om och Tillbyggnad av Göteborg's Rådhus," *Göteborg Förr och Nu,* vol. 6 (1970).

118
The walls were covered in a light ash paneling.

119
Though Asplund probably knew similar European examples, the Bradbury Building in Los Angeles was a good example of such a space.

120
In his book *Experiencing Architecture,* Steen Eiler Rasmussen has perceptively compared the quality of natural light in the main interior space of Asplund's law courts annex with that of the main interior spaces of Nyrop's and Östberg's city halls.

121
Göteborg's Handels och Sjöfarts tidning, 26 October 1936, cited in Fredlund's essay on the building.

122
The interest in primitive art and children's drawings had, as Stanford Anderson suggests, its origins in the early years of the century. By the 1930s such motifs were common in art. It would seem reasonable that Asplund, who followed developments in art closely, would have adapted the idea to architecture.

123
This sort of curved wooden wall had appeared in Asplund's rotunda at the Villa Snellman of 1917–1918, and the wooden detailing of the judges' desks had its source in a cloakroom screen in the Bredenberg Department Store. Wood was, of course, commonly used by other architects as well, and it is less a question of who used it first as how it was used. In this respect Aalto, whose sense of texture was superb, outshone Asplund in the elegance of his wood detailing. The degree to which Asplund was influenced by wood ship detailing remains to be explored.

124
Thus, as I mentioned in the introduction, one can perhaps trace Eero Saarinen's form making, most often regarded as a peculiarly American approach, back through Asplund to this nineteenth-century tradition.

125
Lewerentz would continue to work on the landscaping of the cemetery and has often been considered as responsible for the magnificent open landscape facing the crematorium. But without going into detail about who was responsible for what (a task almost impossible at this late date, with both architects dead), it should be noted that during the crucial period when this landscape took form, in the years 1922–1932, the architects were working jointly on its design. Similarly, Lewerentz was involved in much of the important work of siting the main chapel (the crematorium), as well as in preliminary design proposals for it, the last one dating from 1932. Except for some variation of the open loggia, which was always a part of the conception, and the low wall coming up the hill, these early proposals bear little resemblance to Asplund's final design.

For background on the cremation movement in Europe, see note 133.

126
In conjunction with this plan they had decided to cut a road through the ridge to facilitate certain traffic movements. The cut resulted in the famous knoll with its meditation grove, but it was not until the work was in progress that the architects realized the potential

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of it as an open landscape. Until the plan of 1932 was formulated, the hill was to have pine trees on it as well as graves. The motif of trees forming a square as they do around the meditation place was a theme that had occurred in Asplund's work before, both in the Bernadotte tomb of 1921 and in the competition proposal for the library park in Stockholm of 1926. Thus one suspects that he was responsible for it.

127
At this time it was still not clear that the building would be a crematorium.

128
For the 1923 Gothenburg Exhibition Lewerentz designed a small pavilion for the Swedish Cremation Society. A narrow flight of stairs, which increase in steepness after each landing, leads up the hill to the religious pavilion at the top. Asplund, in a 1923 article in *Byggmästaren,* wrote in highly favorable terms of the increasingly steep processional that cut through a series of terraces on each side but had one criticism. "How would it have been without a building, with an open sky at the top of the steps?" Here we may see the seed of the final conception for the siting of the chapel; for it is in the end the sky almost more than the landscape which becomes the focus of the entry panorama. Lewerentz was to use the idea of the variably steep steps again, this time in reverse, from steep to increasingly shallow, in the beautiful steps he designed leading up to the top of the grass-covered hill. See Gunnar Asplund, "Bilder med Randantekningar från Konstindustribyggnaderna pa Göteborgsutstallningen" (Pictures with notes from the arts and crafts pavilion at the Gothenburg Exhibition), *Byggmästaren,* 1932, p. 277.

129
There is a slight discrepancy between the plan and the sketch, but essentially they refer to the same scheme.

130
The cross harks back to the leaning cross of the original competition entry of 1915.

131
Asplund has further created a directional communication between sky and earth. If the knoll with the meditation grove at its top represents a reaching upward to the sky, a transmitter of man's prayers, the great inverted roof of the loggia with its impluvium is a receiver of the life-giving forces from above. The trunks of the trees mimic the pillars of the loggia.

132
According to Sven Ivar Lind there is a clear correspondence between the shape of the burial vaults below ground of the Rettig and Ankarcrona family mausoleums, both designed by Asplund (of which plans have never been published) and that of the main chapel in cross section.

133
The cremation movement had its source in the late eighteenth century in the French Revolution and the romantic movement, but it was only in the late nineteenth century that it began to gain ground because of the increasingly unsanitary conditions prevailing in the cemeteries of Europe's larger cities. The movement existed almost independently of organized religion and developed its own ideology and symbolism.

In Sweden the Cremation Society published a magazine called *Ignis,* with which Asplund was no doubt familiar. It carried long articles dealing with, among other things, the cremation practices of primitive and exotic peoples, from the early Nordic tribes to the Hindus and Parsees. The publication represented an

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attempt to compile a history for the movement as well as to find significant symbols and rituals. Among the important symbols was the phoenix. Initially the movement, inspired by Lessing, had adopted antiquity's idealized vision of death rather than the darker Christian one, symbolized by the skeleton. But it was finally Herder's use of Thanatos as symbol of death but also of rebirth that came to prevail. I am indebted for most of this information to Ulf G. Johnsson's "De första Svenska Crematorierna och deras förutsättningar."

134
A detail which the building committee asked Asplund to eliminate.

135
The benches in the waiting room similarly evoke the railroad station, as does, on a much more abstract level, the linearity of the scheme.

136
It may be noted that the great Bronze Age burial mounds in Denmark have, especially when they occur in pairs, always been referred to by the local population as the "maiden mounds."

137
Three other projects were on Asplund's drawing board when he died, in addition to the three I will discuss here. The block of flats on Malmskillnads Street of 1939 were never built. The Stockholm City Archives Building of 1939–1940, designed to be built into a granite hill was to be realized in somewhat modified form under the supervision of Sven Ivar Lind, who also oversaw the construction of the Kviberg and Skövde crematoria. The State Veterinary Bacteriological Laboratories, a sprawling complex on the outskirts of Stockholm which grew out of Asplund's work on the State Bacteriological Laboratories, was also to be built after his death by Joel Lundquist, a former associate.

138
Unfortunately, when built the wall went straight into the hill rather than climbing up it as originally designed, thus destroying an essential element of the composition.

139
Asplund's coupling of rough gneiss walls with smooth granite support structure around the main windows recalls Lars Sonck's facade for the Telephone Building in Helsinki, a building with which Asplund would no doubt have been familiar. Another possible source of inspiration would have been H. H. Richardson's work in America, some of which Asplund probably saw during his American trip in 1938, the same year that this version of the Kviberg project was done.

140
According to Sven Ivar Lind, Asplund, in his designs for the Skövde Crematorium, drew inspiration from the medieval stone churches that were common in that part of Sweden.

141
The Skövde Crematorium provided one of the first examples of a modern building with exposed wooden roof trusses. This treatment was to become a popular Scandinavian motif, used with particular lyricism by Alvar Aalto.

142
Asplund would also have been aware of the first-prize competition design for the Linköping Museum by Nils Åhrbom and Helge Zimdahl of 1936, where a low, square block at a skew is played off against a long, rectangular main wing.

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Conclusions

143
Interviews with Sven Ivar Lind, Tore Åhlsen, and Torvald Åkerson.

144
According to Torvald Åkerson.

145
One can say that Asplund did not conceive his detailing only in terms of function and form but also in terms of significance, a dimension that elsewhere has been conspicuously absent since the advent of the Modern Movement.

146
Thus, for instance, in the many perspective sketches for the loggia at the crematorium, Asplund appears to have rehearsed many of the developments in American architecture in the 1950s and 1960s, from the more banal to the more inspired, in the area of solutions for pavilion-type buildings.

147
Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," *Sketches.*

148
Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect.*

149
Only in his discussion of the Skandia Cinema does he appear to have departed significantly from this pattern.

150
Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," *Sketches.*

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Chronological Record

Erik Gunnar Asplund was born in Stockholm September 22, 1885, and died in Stockholm October 20, 1940

Studies

1905–1909
Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Division of Architecture

1910–1911
Private school of architecture under the direction of the architects Bergsten, Tengbom, Westman, and Östberg

Foreign Travel

1910
Germany (traveling scholarship of Royal Institute of Technology principally for the study of concrete as facing material), Belgium.

1913–1914
France and Italy

1918
Denmark

1920
United States (to study public libraries)

1921
Italy

1927
Italy

1928
Germany, Austria, France, Czechoslavakia, Switzerland

1930
Great Britain

1934
Denmark, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, France, Great Britain

1938
United States (in conjunction with Delaware celebrations, when Asplund gave four lectures in various towns on Swedish architectural problems after 1930)

1939
Germany, Switzerland, France, Great Britain. Also visits on different occasions to neighbor countries of Scandinavia and the Baltic

Appointments

1912–1913
Assistant lecturer in architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology

1917–1918
Special instructor in ornamental art at the Royal Institute of Technology

1917–1920
Editor of *Teknisk Tidskrift, Arkitektur*

1931–1940
Professor of architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology

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Projects (*) and Works Executed

1909
*Elementary school, Hälsingborg competition design

*Swedish Church in Paris, competition

Villa for Ivar Asplund, Lidingö

1912
*Elementary school, Kalmar, competition design, second prize

*Villa, Rosenberg, Karlshamn

*Timmermansorden (Order of Carpenters) building in Stockholm, competition design together with Hj. S:son Berven, bought

1912-1918
Secondary school, Karlshamn, competition design, first prize, commission received later

1913
Gothenburg Law Courts, Annex, competition design, first prize

*Mixed school, Hedemora, invited competition, first on list of awards

Villa Selander, Örnsköldsvik

Sturegården, Nyköping

1914
Telegraph and Post Office, Karlshamn

Dr. Ruth's villa, Kymmene Ltd, Kuusankoski, Finland

1915
Entrance buildings to Hammarby Sports Ground, Stockholm

Communion vessels in silver for Hofors Chapel

Train sheds, Enskede

Stockholm South Burial Ground (Skogskyrkogården, Woodland Cemetery), international competition, design together with Sigurd Lewerentz, first prize, commission

Ålberga: types for one-, two- and three-family houses, village shop, Villa Callin, etc.

*Ålberga: meeting hall and inn.

1915-1924
Elementary school, Gothenburg (Carl Johan School), competition design, second prize, commission received later

1916
Housing for Russian Steel Rope Factory Ltd. Ekaterinoslav, Russia

Gothenburg Law Courts Annex project

Tiled stove, competition, Upsala-Ekeby, second prize

1917
Workers' housing, Stockholm

*Göta Square, Gothenburg, competition design

Interiors, home exhibition of Swedish Society of Arts and Crafts

Government cold-storage warehouse, Hallsberg

1917-1918
Villa Snellman at Djursholm

Government grain warehouses (as architectural advisor to Carl Forsell), Eskiltuna, Eslöv, Linkoping, Åstorp, Tomelilla, Vara

Tisenhult Manor, near Katrineholm, restoration

1917-1921
Lister County Courthouse, Sölvesborg

1918
Workers' housing, Tidaholms bruk

*Brokind Manor, Östergötland, extension and restoration of residence

*Gustaf Adolf Square, Gothenburg, invitation competition for laying out and arrangement of square, with Law Courts Annex and the Stock Exchange quarter, first on list of awards

*Cemetery, Västerås

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1918-1920
Skogskapellet (Woodland Chapel), Stockholm South Burial Ground

1919
*Railway goods station, St. Eriksplan, Stockholm, project with Ture Tideblad

Font in silver for St. Petri Church, Malmö, invited competition

1919-1920
*Gustaf Adolf Square, Gothenburg, project for Law Courts Annex and Stock Exchange quarter

1920
Interiors, Exhibition of the Workshops Society

1920-1928
Stockholm Public Library

1921
Almunge Cemetery, extension

*Helgeandsholmen, Stockholm, competition design, second prize

Furniture for various rooms, Stockholm City Hall

Prince Oscar Bernadotte's family vault, North Burial Ground, Stockholm

1922
Klevaliden, bridge and road approaches

*Royal Chancellery Buildings, Stockholm, competition design with Ture Ryberg, second prize

*Baron Åkerhielm family tomb

1922-1923
Skandia Cinema, Stockholm

1922-1924
Offices, Skogskyrkogården, (Woodland Cemetery) Stockholm

1923
Town plan for area around Observatoriekullen, Stockholm

1924
*Gustaf Adolf Square, Gothenburg, project for arrangement of Stock Exchange quarter

Interior for Paris Exhibition, 1925

*Pavilion for Paris Exhibition, 1925, invited competition, project

1924-1925
Admiral Sten Ankarcrona's family vault, North Burial Ground, Stockholm

Restaurant Gillet's assembly hall, Stockholm, fixtures and fittings

1924-1929
Cemetery at Oxelösund

1925
Gothenburg Law Courts Annex project approved by the City Council

*Flagpoles for Gustaf Adolf Square in Gothenburg

1926
Danelius Fund competition for public work of art in Stockholm, together with Ivar Johnsson (respecting the Public Library Park), bought.

Cemetery at Kviberg, Gothenburg, competition design, first prize, commissioned

*Planning of housing area near Kviberg Cemetery, Gothenburg, project

*Odenhallen (market hall) near Stockholm Public Library

1926-1928
Secretary of State Hj. Rettig's family vault, North Burial Ground, Stockholm

1927-1935
Landscape plan for Public Library Park, Stockholm

1928
*Arvfursten (crown prince's) Palace, Stockholm, project for reconstruction and extension (approved by Royal Office of Works)

1928-1930
Stockholm Exhibition

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1929–1936
Extension to secondary school at Karlshamn

1931
Building at Nybrogatan 7, Stockholm, reconstruction, fittings, and furniture for the premises of Swedish Arts and Crafts Society

1932
*Block of flats in Norr Mälarstrand, Stockholm, for Stockholm Breweries Ltd., invited competition, extra prize

*Chapel at Kviberg Cemetery, Gothenburg, design for invitation competition

*Malmö Museum, competition design

1933
*Houseboat for the artist Gustaf Carlström

*Interior for National Museum

1933–1935
Bredenberg Department Store, Stockholm

1933–1937
State Bacteriological Laboratories, Stockholm, invited competition, first prize, commission

1934
*Bromma Airport, design for invited competition
Summer residence at Stavsnäs for B. Beckström

1934–1937
Gothenburg Law Courts Annex (approved for execution by City Council)

1935
*Stockholm Tower at entrance to Skansen

1935–1937
Chapel, Oxelösund

1935–1940
Crematorium at Skogskyrkogården (Woodland Cemetery), Stockholm

1936
*Building for Stockholm Nation (student corps) at Uppsala

1936–1940
*Kviberg Crematorium, Gothenburg, design for invited competition, first prize, commission (uncompleted)

Stennäs in Sorunda Parish, Stockholm County, Gunnar Asplund's own summer residence

*Stockholm Tower and square at Maritime Museum

1937–1940
*Skövde Crematorium, commission (uncompleted)

*State Veterinary Bacteriological Laboratory, Stockholm, commission (uncompleted)

1938–1939
*Social Welfare Offices in Stockholm, invited competition, first prize and further work on project

1939
*Block of flats at Malmskillnadsgatan, Stockholm

1939–1940
*Stockholm City Archives, invited competition, first prize, commission (uncompleted)

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